

## EDITORIAL

### THE CRY OF OUR TIMES

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As of today we are witnessing major parts of the globe experiencing the fallout from the current invasion of America on Iran. The modern world so dependent on the daily consumption of fuel products has started having the early tremors of the violent impact of war.

Is war really a moment of celebration for the nations and its people? How should one view the sentiment and exuberance of different countries and people associated with it?

During a war the people of a nation involved in a war rise in a spirit of nation-worship against those who are no different from them. The Panjab has seen wars and bloodshed since ages. We are witness to the trail of travails and tribulations of violence over the past three centuries and paid an incalculable price for the fight against oppression and injustice. But still the fact remains that even the noblest of the conflicts result into losses which remain irreparable. The recent surfacing of recordings of Panjabi soldiers fighting in desperate situations during the First Great War is a testimony to the cry of the valorous against the curse of war.

The other great casualty of wars and aggression is the precious heritage and memories of the past. The reckless bombing of the great cities in the two World Wars saw the ancient buildings crashing down and the relics of the past getting destroyed. In 2001 AD, the blind religious frenzy of the Taliban brought down the 1400 year old Bamiyan Buddha carved in the Gandhara tradition. What happened to Nalanda at the hands of Bakhtiyar Khilji is too tragic to be described in words. The examples of such insanity of the human race are endless.

The ecological disaster brought about by the recent conflicts in

different war zones in some parts of the world has attracted the attention of responsible print-media at the national level. "The Tribune in a researched report published in the closing days of March has highlighted the monstrous implications of these theatres of war. It reports that,

"The environmental impact of the ongoing US/Israel war on Iran will be much worse, both for the land and the sea, especially now that oil facilities are fair game for all parties. Israel's attack on Iran's Pars gas field on March 18 is the beginning of an ecocide in the whole region : it processes 600 million cubic meters of natural gas every day. With such a humongous volume being set on fire, the toxic fumes will envelop not only Iran but the entire Gulf region, and could travel even as far as Pakistan and India."

The entire world is worried about the destructive outcome of this war. Reminding us of the scale of destruction in the past, The Tribune report concludes with a stern warning that,

"Have we forgotten what happened during the Iraq war, when Saddam Hussein spilled millions of litres of oil into the sea ? That marine area has yet to recover, even after decades".

One may say in the end that no one can escape the concerns even when the wars are fought on distant lands. The survival of human race in the wake of destructive arsenal in the hands of maglomatic leaders like Donald Trump has always been a scaring apprehension for the mankind. Arnold Toynbee the doyan of modern historians, in his introduction to the 'Sacred Writings of the Sikhs', prophesied in the middle of last century that the message enshrined in the Sikh scripture Guru Granth can be the last hope for the survival of the human race in the midst of the nations engulfed in war.

*Abstracts of Sikh Studies* has received a tremendous response from the noted scholars this time. It is heartening that many a young researchers are joining the train of established scholars to enrich the area of Sikh Studies. I earnestly hope that in future the Journal will continue to receive the enthusiastic patronage of its readers and academics. The valuable response of the contributors and suggestions from our informed readers are sure to make the Abstracts more presentable in the days to come.

## KIRTAN IN SIKH TRADITION

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*Kirtan* takes a pioneer place in reciting the Name of God in Sikhism. The word *Kirtan* is derived from *Kirt* means praise. God is supreme and the stress is laid to glorify His attributes. The use of musical instruments for this purpose is known as *Kirtan*. To seek His blessings with the chant of *mantras* is not new in Sikhism; it can be traced back to the Vedas. In *bhakti* movement, a number of *bhaktas* chanted lyrics in devotion to obtain the blessings of their master. The Hindu and Muslim Sufi saints expressed their love and devotion to the Supreme Reality, the formless God, in their hymns. The hymns of few saints are incorporated in Guru Granth Sahib sung by the Sikhs with musical instruments.

In *Kirtan* importance is given to the words, “the compositions are set to music only when there is a harmony between the ‘feel’ of the *svaras* and the words, and the meanings of the compositions become alive in musical terms alone.”<sup>1</sup> This combination of the *svaras* and the holy words produces an inspiration in an individual that causes for love, humility and *rasa* (delight). *Kirtan* in Sikhism is a “coordination of three things; ideas (philosophy), poetry (intuition) and music. This is a unique combination having the two dynamic arts in the mixture. Sikhism has adopted it for uplifting of the souls of the disciples and purifying them. Hence, foremost place is given to *Kirtan* in the *nam simran marg* for realization of God. *Kirtan* is an easy substitute for *yogic* concentration, ritualism and asceticism. It is an emotional approach. Since religion is a matter of feeling, *Kirtan* is the best practicable method available to man living a common household life.”<sup>2</sup> The household

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life lead towards materialism and one cannot think of emancipation while living in this mundane world. Sikh Gurus denounced this myth and they considered the word of Guru, revealed to them by God, is enough to live beyond all miseries. The *sabad* effects more easily when recites with the musical instruments. It soothes the mind and leads to higher social and moral values.

It is accepted in Sikhism that all the creatures of this world have same light. However, nobody recognized it due to ignorance and thus the people are divided in different castes and sub-castes. This ignorance needs to be removed and it can be put out of mind by the Divine laudation. Sikh Gurus also recognized that:

*In Kaliyuga singing of Divine laudation  
is the Supreme act.<sup>3</sup>*

*Kirtan* influences all the people who listen to it devotedly and uplifts them from earth to heaven in spirituality. It is not confined to one particular community. Guru Nanak and his devoted Muslim disciple Mardana, who was always with the Guru in all his travels, used to perform *Kirtan* with an instrument called *rabab*. The *Kirtan* of Guru Nanak helped him in his travels to sooth the minds of common people and “they used it as an instrument for national integration. Both Hindus and Muslims sang hymns together in praise of God. The Guru’s musicians included Muslim singers called *rababis* who sang their sacred compositions in classical or folk tunes.”<sup>4</sup> *Kirtan* of Guru Nanak soothes the people in tension, anger, fear, hatred and it is the product of love, fraternity and brotherhood. When a “man is disappointed with religious practices, philosophies and other intellectual searches, he can find comfort and peace only by listening to sacred songs - *Kirtan*. This sacred music is simple but full of emotional sincerity.”<sup>5</sup> There are lot of examples in Sikh history which show that the *Kirtan* of Guru Nanak changed the evil minds of the people and led them to a true path. In one of his travels, Guru Nanak reached Burma where the king was a Buddhist. When the people of that land heard the laudation and sermons of Guru Nanak they were deeply impressed and were “beginning to repudiate Buddhism, adopting Guru’s monotheistic religion. On this, the king was all wraths and with a drawn sword in hand, rushed towards the place where the Guru was, in order to kill

him. On this, the Guru uttered a hymn in the vernacular of the Raja. On hearing this Raja could not strike the blow, and his mind was instantly changed from the evil design. He humbly asked for forgiveness, which was granted. He was so changed that he himself became a follower of the Guru's faith."<sup>6</sup> Guru Nanak transformed a lot of immoral personalities into moral beings with his hymns. In the views of G.S. Mansukhani "It was Guru Nanak's hymn which opened the eyes of Sajjan *thug*, to the enormity of his crimes; it was again Guru Nanak's sweet song which won the heart of Kaoda, the Cannibal. Similarly, his clairvoyant chanting made the dancing damsels of Sri Lanka - deliberately sent to tempt him - turn into virtuous maids. The gentle vibrations of holy music overcome anger and ego and wash away the inner filth of dark souls."<sup>7</sup>

The *Kirtan* of Guru Nanak affects all the communities of the world even if they cannot understand the meaning of the hymns but simply listen to it by heart. There is one of the incidents in the life of Guru Nanak when he was on his visit to Baghdad<sup>8</sup> from the Mecca. Mardana in the very early morning started Divine music, which is prohibited in the Muslim laws, they considered it inferior because according to their law it diverts man's mind towards vice. However, the Divine music of Guru Nanak appealed to the hearts of Muslims also when "the few Baghdadis, who, in the silent hours of early dawn, happened to hear the divine song at close quarters, found that it had struck and set vibrating some invisible chords in the innermost depths of their hearts. They forgot their mundane affairs; they forgot their music banning law of Islam; they forgot their own acquired aversion to music. They sat spell-bound, listening in mute adoration."<sup>9</sup> Guru Nanak preached the message of God in the world with the help of *Kirtan*. *Kirtan* is a source of Divine path in this world and particularly in Sikhism. It has a "powerful effect on the human mind. Man's mind is mercurial and unstable. It flirts and flies from one thought or place to another. It is also full of tensions and desires and lacks equipoise and peace. *Kirtan* calms the mind and makes it contented. It creates a feeling of repose and satisfaction."<sup>10</sup>

Guru Nanak composed his hymns in the poetical form in the *ragas*, easy to perform in *Kirtan*. This also indicates Guru's love for

music. The later Gurus adopted this poetical form of hymns also. Gurus introduced the special musical instruments to perform *Kirtan*. The instruments “like *rabab* which Mardana, the life companion of Guru Nanak, used and *saranda* which Guru Arjan introduced for *Kirtan* of the *sabad*, have become symbol vehicles for *japa*.”<sup>11</sup> This instrumental music started by the Gurus is known as *Kirtan*. When the holy people used to sing the *sabad* of the Guru with the instruments that removed hatred, anger and rigidness from the minds of people and created the spirit of love, affection and brotherhood.

Guru Amardas, the third Guru of the Sikhs, stressed to recite the *sachi bani*. To keep intact the *sachi bani* in the name of Gurus, *bhaktas*, *bhatts* and other religious personalities, Guru Arjan, the fifth Guru of the Sikhs, compiled Guru Granth Sahib. While compiling (Guru) Granth Sahib he seeks to collect a copy of manuscript, containing the *bani* of first three Gurus, from Baba Mohan, the son of Guru Amardas. For this purpose, he sent Bhai Gurdas and Baba Buddha, one after the other, to bring the *pothis* from Baba Mohan but they did not succeed in getting it. Then Guru Arjan went to collect the hymns from Baba Ji. The tradition reveals that he “sat in the dust of the street in front of Mohan’s dwelling, and sang the hymns with accompaniment of the *tambura*”.<sup>12</sup> The *Kirtan* of the true king of people cooled Mohan’s heart and he gave the *pothis* to Guru Arjan respectfully. Guru Arjan compiled the whole *bani* in one volume under different musical measures. The words like *lai*, *tal*, *ghar*, *rahau* etc. are commonly used for singing the true word of the Guru in described compositions. The sentence before, *rahau* takes central place or central idea in the *sabad*.

*Kirtan* takes place in *gurdwaras* in the presence of *saigat*. The *sabad* of Guru Granth Sahib provides higher knowledge and music soothes the mind. The congeniality of *sabad* and *savara* in singing of *sabad* influenced the mind that further reflects in deeds of the listeners. *Kirtan* changes the inner life of an individual, turns him toward good deeds and desist him from evil doings. The *Kirtan* can be performed by any person of the society despite the fact of color, caste and status. When an individual sings the songs of God, Father of all, he definitely feels changed in his thought and deed as Guru Ramdas says:

*Praise have I sung of the Lord Supreme, the*

*Divine Master, tuning the measure Bilaval:  
 In the Master's teaching have I put faith,  
 by supreme good fortune on my forehead writ in primal time.  
 Day and night have I lauded the Lord,  
 with love for Him in heart.  
 Thereby body and mind grown fresh,  
 the self like a garden bloomed.  
 Darkness of ignorance has lifted,  
 as the lamp of enlightenment by the Master given, is lit.<sup>13</sup>*

The Divine laudation of *Kirtan* produces a joy in the mind of an individual that leads him towards the path of God and removes all his dualities in the mind. However, if there is ego in the mind even after singing holy hymns of Lord then there is no use of this type of

*Kirtan as in the views of Guru Nanak:  
 Songs, tunes, music all are false,  
 From the Three Qualities arising and falling,  
 keeping the self far from God.  
 By clinging to foul thinking of duality is  
 not suffering ended.  
 Release comes from the medicine of singing  
 by the Master's guidance, of Divine laudation.<sup>14</sup>*

The real meaning of singing the Divine laudation is to keep in mind the teachings of the holy hymns as Guru Nanak said:

*Those chanting His laudation, listening to it  
 with minds attentive;  
 Those to Him devoted -  
 Their sorrows annulled,  
 Are into the House of Bliss ushered.<sup>15</sup>*

The performance of *Kirtan* on the line of Guru Nanak is progressive because it “washes away the filth of ego and evil inclinations. It purifies the mind and inspires one to lead a moral and virtuous life. It enthuses the disciple to emulate the qualities which we associate with God, as for example, truth, justice, fearlessness and compassion.”<sup>16</sup> Ancient Indian scholars of music are of the view that it helps in curing many types of mental and physical diseases. They say “dangerous fever are cured by Bhairvi, anemic diseases by Basant,

worrying diseases by Bilaval, asthma by Deepak, tuberculosis by Ramkali, and despondency by Kalian.”<sup>17</sup> The *ragas* are also included in Guru Granth Sahib that gives recovery from diseases through devotional *Kirtan*. Guru Amardas says:

*Absorption in the holy word banishes sorrows,  
maladies and torments.*<sup>18</sup>

Guru Arjan also reveals that without the laudation of the Name of God there are many mental sufferings in life:

*As is the Name neglected, come suffering,  
maladies and sorrow :  
With chanting of the Lord's praise is found  
bliss everlasting.*<sup>19</sup>

With the removal of mental suffering by *Kirtan* it produces love in the mind of an individual. Chanting of hymns are prescribed to perform in the *gurdwaras* where the people go in the form of *saigat*. In the *gurdwaras* people sing the hymns, from Guru Granth Sahib and other secondary sources of Sikhism, and it becomes the mode of union of people and due to its higher values the Sikh Gurus laid a great stress on *Kirtan* in holy company:

*In holy company chant Divine laudation:  
This state by the Master's guidance is obtained.*<sup>20</sup>

Bhai Gurdas, the first Sikh theologian, also laid a great stress on *Kirtan* and he advocated performing it in every house:

*There is Dharmsal in every house and  
Kirtan is going on constantly.*<sup>21</sup>

Sikh Gurus consider it as a supreme act in this world in *kaliyuga* as in the views of Guru Arjan Dev Ji.

*In Kaliyuga singing of Divine laudation  
is the supreme act.*<sup>22</sup>

*Kirtan* may be performed individually or in a group. Any person having a faith in Guru Granth Sahib can sing devotional hymns. The choice of singing hymns is restricted to few revered compositions as is described in the *Sikh Rabit Maryada*, “In the congregation, *Kirtan* only of Gurbani (Guru Granth's or Guru Gobind Singh's hymns) and, for its elaboration, of the compositions of Bhai Gurdas and Bhai Nand

Lal, may be performed.”<sup>23</sup>

*Kirtan* as an art “touches the inner chords and evokes the latent divine harmony in the human soul. It is with the birth of this harmony that the ultimate reality is revealed.”<sup>24</sup> The *Kirtan* is a congregational activity; it develops a new ecumenical relationship of confraternity and brotherhood in the society. Sometimes *katha* is performed to elaborate the meaning of *sabad* to make it understandable with the *Kirtan*. Bhai Nand Lal, a disciple of the tenth Guru, stressed upon listening God’s eulogy in both *Kirtan* and *katha*.<sup>25</sup> He further stated those who do not engrossed in these two, talks disrespectfully to saints, indulges in slandery and loses property in gambling, will be punished by *kal* (death).<sup>26</sup> *Katha* is performed in the *gurdwaras* in morning and evening. In tradition, the *katha* of *sabad* is held in the morning and the discourse of history is the part of evening prayer.

According to Semitic tradition, God created man in His own image. The view of God creator is acceptable in other faiths also. In Sikhism, it is stated that humankind came into existence with light of one Supreme Lord. This view supported that spirituality is a part of every human being and that is to be aroused to uplift him on the spiritual planes. *Kirtan* is a strong tradition in Sikhism to regenerate the relation between self and supreme-self.

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## MARTYRDOM IN SIKHISM

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Sikh history is a long saga of sacrifices made and persecutions and martyrdoms suffered by the Sikhs in pursuit of the lofty ideals of freedom, equality, justice and righteousness. The term martyr has become an integral part of the Sikh religious tradition. The purpose of this paper is to study the unique phenomenon of martyrdom, in relation to its origin and growth, handed down to the Sikhs by the Gurus. Who is a martyr? What are the attributes of a martyr in Sikhism? What was the motivating force that impelled the Sikhs to pay such heavy price in terms of blood and suffering? How does the concept of martyrdom among the Sikhs differ from that of the others? This paper seeks to find answers to all these questions. The paper takes full cognizance of the role of Sikh ideology in shaping Sikh history and providing comprehensive understanding of the Sikh tradition of martyrdom.

The concept of martyrdom has its roots in the Sikh ideology. Prior to the advent of Guru Nanak on the scene, the dominant refrain of the Indian religions was that the phenomenal world was nothing but a mirage, an illusion that must be shunned as a first step on the spiritual path. Such a view sanctified asceticism, monasticism and celibacy. It did not look upon the phenomenal world as a place worthy of improvement. Being too much occupied with other-worldliness, it reflected little concern with social and human problems. The result was that men of religion, imbued with the ideal of personal salvation, bade farewell to the house holder's life, cut themselves away from the society and pursued the spiritual path in complete isolation in the safety of mountains and caves. This life-negating and apathetic outlook was bound to cast its shadow on the socio-political scene witnessed in

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the form of quietistic, fatalistic and negative trends in the society.

Contrary to all this, Guru Nanak descended on the scene with his life-affirming faith and revolutionary ideals. He repudiated asceticism and renunciation and declared, in unambiguous terms, that the phenomenal world was real and meaningful. He laid down for his followers the path of the house holder, thereby establishing a clear link between the spiritual and empirical planes of human existence.

The Guru assigned an active and creative role to religion and made it a vehicle to promote the values of universal love, brotherhood of mankind, truth, righteousness and social responsibility. The Guru believed that a man of religion cannot be an indifferent spectator to the acts of tyranny and injustice around him. Guru Nanak's sensitive heart throbbed with anguish at the sight of social and political oppression of his times. It was left to the Guru to truly see the plight of the down trodden and to devise means for their amelioration. Guru's Sikh was not supposed to be a self-contained, self-centred man, given solely to spiritual pursuits. He was to be a man of action, taking a real and abiding interest in the world around him.

The Guru laid the foundation of an activist faith in which love was the foremost element. But he clarified, in explicit terms, that the path of love which he recommended for his followers was full of hardships and hazards. It entailed selfless service and sacrifice. His call was "If thou are zealous of playing the game of love, put your head on your palm. But once you set your foot on this path, don't seek a way out and be prepared to sacrifice your head". This revolutionary call set the direction in which the Sikh movement was to move.

The Guru rejected the traditional concept of *Mukti* (salvation) and gave it a new orientation. In his gospel, *Mukti* does not signify release from life and its commitments as in the traditional sense. It signifies liberation from the self-centredness (ego) and liberation from all fears like the fear of insecurity, fear of oppression and injustice and fear of want. For a Sikh, *Mukti* is to seek martyrdom in the battles fought for upholding a righteous and a noble cause. It signifies a state of illumination. A man realises his inner essence, the eternity of his spiritual self, which is free from the servitude of time and space. The Guru envisions *Mukti* in a new perspective of *Jeevan Mukti*.

A true seeker inculcates the attributes of universal love, righteousness and fearlessness which bring him close to Divinity. He becomes aware of the unity of mankind and rejects man-made barriers separating man from man. Attuned to Cosmic Order and enriched with the experience of spiritual harmony, he becomes the highest instrument of Divine purpose and strives for the furtherance of universal harmony. His inner dynamism leads him on the path of liberation with the ultimate aim to redress the wrongs prevailing around him, to restore love, harmony and justice in human affairs and to establish God's Kingdom on earth. Such a man refuses to compromise with evil, falsehood, selfishness and moral ugliness. He is ready to stake his life in pursuit of the divine attributes of love, truth and justice. For him death loses its horror, rather it becomes for him a supreme blessing, a sublime act for the common weal, which transcends his individual self.

The concept of martyrdom did not exist in the traditional Indian ethos. It was left to the Sikh Gurus to lift Indian history into new dimensions through the revolutionary concept of martyrdom. Both through precept and example, they inspired their followers with new adventures of thought and action and enabled them to change the course of history. Fight against oppression and injustice, which formed the bedrock of Guru's teachings became an integral part of the Sikh ethos and the motivating principle of Sikh martyrdoms. The struggle of the Sikh Gurus against the Mughal empire was not a personal one. They fought against tyranny and oppression and sacrificed their lives for universal causes, for the freedom of conscience and freedom of worship for all.

Fifth Sikh Guru Arjan Dev was the first to wear the crown of martyrdom in Sikh history. The Guru had to face inhuman torture and suffer martyrdom to uphold fundamental human rights like the freedom to profess religion of one's own choice. The Guru's martyrdom had far reaching consequences as it prepared the Sikhs for an armed resistance to counter forces of tyranny and injustice. As per Guru Arjan's instructions, his son and successor donned two swords as embodiment of *Miri* and *Piri*.

Ninth Sikh Guru Tegh Bahadur, a passionate apostle of human rights, also had to tread the path of martyrdom, while raising his voice against a powerful regime which nurtured the unholy ambition of converting the entire sub-continent into the fold of Islam. There have

been instances where men had fanatically sought death while protecting their own creed. But Guru's unprecedented sacrifice for the defence of Kashmin Brahamins, who belonged to a faith other than his own, demonstrated that the sphere of social altruism for the Sikhs knew no boundaries. Such a sacrifice inspired by the lofty ideals of universal weal (Sarbat Da Bhala) was unique in the history of mankind. Guru's martyrdom won universal applause from the non-Muslims as a sacrifice for their faith. They were awakened to a new consciousness of religious and political freedom after a slumber of centuries. Guru's injunctions, "fear not, frighten not set hearts ablaze. The Sikh movement was put into a new gear into its history.

The concept of martyrdom was concretized by Guru Gobind Singh who created the Khalsa a disciplined body of the Sikhs. Inspired by a divine mission to right the wrongs of the world, Khalsa was to be God's agent in the world to restore justice and righteousness. Guru exhorted his followers to come up to his ideal of a saint-soldier (Sant-Sipahi) who would combine in him the virtues of a saint and the strength and courage of a soldier. This direction was a clear fulfilment of the spiritual thesis of Guru Nanak. Martyrdom of the Guru and his sons for the cause of righteousness was unique in the annals of mankind.

Subsequent history of the Sikhs provides a glorious example of spiritually elevated superhuman struggle against tremendous odds. It was certainly the ethos of Sikh faith with its emphasis on a fight for righteousness that was the core of heightened sense of truth in Banda Bahadur and has men that enabled them to shake the foundations of the Mughal empire and impelled them to suffer martyrdom without fear. A long series of martyrdoms adorn the pages of Sikh history during the turbulent eighteenth century when the Sikhs were persecuted, exiled and tracked down like wild animals. It was the ideological motivation of the Gurus that sustained the Sikhs throughout this struggle. The heroic death of men like Bhai Taru Singh, Bhai Mani Singh, Bhai Bota Singh and Baba Deep Singh kept the torch of martyrdom alive among the Sikhs. It is well-known that the fight for country's freedom was fought and won with the Sikhs in the forefront. These freedom fighters were not mercenaries. They were truly inspired by the virtues of fearlessness, steadfastness, dedication and commitment to the cause the virtues that go into the making of martyrs. True to their ideological moorings, many of them embraced the gallows

with the name of God and the Guru on their lips. This tradition has remained vibrant and relevant till date.

### CONCLUSION

The ethico-spiritual dynamic society bequeathed to the Sikhs by the Gurus has been mirrored by them in their history. Guru Nanak conceived the concept of martyrdom, Guru Arjan, Gur Tegh Bhadur and Guru Gobind Singh concretized it in history. The seeds of egalitarian social justice and freedom planted by Guru Nanak were nurtured by the successive Gurus and bore fruit with the creation of the Khalsa by the Tenth Guru. Khalsa released a dynamic force in the Indian history. Some Western scholars maintain that the Sikh ideal of martyrdom developed 'in response to the complex social, religious and political pressures with which the Sikhs were confronted. They tend to overlook the role of Sikh ideology in inculcating the ideals of heroism, sacrifice and bravery for the cause of truth and righteousness. Their accounts of Sikh history often devalue the heroic Sikh martyrdoms by describing them as mere exigencies of war or some other crisis. Lois E. Fenech, who wrote his doctoral thesis, *Martyrdom in the Sikh Tradition*, under the supervision of W.H. Meleod, asserts that the Sikhs have tried to glorify and romanticize their tradition by using the 'rhetoric of martyrdom'. He takes no cognisance of the ideological motivation which has been the driving force in Sikh history. His judgment of Sikh tradition is downright biased. It gives a glimpse of the conditioned approach of the some Christian scholars towards the glorious Sikh tradition which has so admirably stood for the sublime goals of universal love and brotherhood of mankind. In some other traditions, martyrdom is associated with even forcible conversions or with killing of infidels. In Guru Nanak's 'game of love' martyrdom is elevated to lofty peaks where love for God and Guru is the sole motivating force for suffering martyrdom. Sikh history is replete with examples of inspired men who spurned all offers of wordly rewards and even promises of paradise (after death) for the sake of their love for God and Guru. This makes them stand out as heroes of a divinely ordained mission. That is why there is always an eloquent reference to the sacred memories of these martyrs in the daily Sikh prayer. Memory of these martyrs overwhelms the minds of the congregation with awe and reverence for their selfless and heroic deeds.

**FEARLESSNESS AND HUMAN JUSTICE:  
EXPLORING GURU TEGH BAHADUR'S TEACHINGS  
AND SACRIFICE FROM A FRESH PERSPECTIVE**

**DR PASHAURA SINGH\***

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**ABSTRACT**

This article explores the state of fearlessness and human justice through an examination of five celebrated couplets from Guru Tegh Bahadur's *bâni* ("inspired utterances") by placing them in their immediate historical context, followed by an understanding of their wider significance from a global perspective. The main arguments of this essay revolve around the critical situation in Mughal India leading to the Ninth Guru's execution at Chandni Chowk in Delhi on November 11, 1675 by the orders of Emperor Aurangzeb. Rectifying skewed perspectives offered by modern historians in which the death of the Ninth Guru is simply an accident of history and therefore of no consequence to wider humanity, this essay offers a critical review of historical readings of events that forced Guru Tegh Bahadur to intervene in the flow of history on behalf of downtrodden and minority voices. To bring the people out of their vulnerability he inspired them with a bold message of resistance against the tyrannical regime by cultivating the spirit of fearlessness and carefree optimism. This study offers novel readings of the Guru's poetic verses of defiance by underscoring the point that no sacrifice is too great to defend the freedom of conscience, along with the eternal hope that Truth prevails ultimately.

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## INTRODUCTION

The year 2025 marks the 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur (1621-1675), the ninth Guru of the Sikh tradition, providing us with an opportunity to explore his teachings and sacrifice from a fresh perspective. The principal aims of this article are fourfold: first, it makes the case for constructing Guru Tegh Bahadur's teachings and sacrifice from his own works and other contemporary and near contemporary sources, particularly focusing on the thematic analysis of his five celebrated couplets. Second, it offers critical review of historical readings of events that forced the ninth Guru to intervene in the flow of history on behalf of downtrodden and minority voices, and to stay true to his ideals at the cost of his life. Third, it forcefully takes issue with modern historians like Audrey Truschke and others who consider the ninth Guru's death as simply an accident of history and therefore of no consequence to wider humanity. The correction and rectification of their perspective is clearly important because it nullifies sacrifice as a form of interventionist justice into yet another state execution. Finally, this study contests the erroneous assumptions of generations of Sikh scholars who attributed Guru Tegh Bahadur's couplet to the tenth Guru based upon traditional sources. To justify my novel readings, I have provided the photographs of certain folios of the manuscripts of the *Adi Granth* ("Original Scripture"), including an early portrait of Guru Tegh Bahadur from Dacca. In this study I have relied upon the information supplied by several *bhams* ("bards of Brahminic origins") who recorded genealogies in their *vahis* ("record-books") of the Guru period from the sixth Guru, Hargobind (1590-1644) through the tenth Guru, Gobind Singh (1666-1708). These *vahis* provide a wealth of historical and sociological information. Bhamm Sarup Singh Kaushish's *Gurū Kīān Sākhiān* ("Narratives of the Gurus" written in 1790 CE) is predominantly based on these early sources (Piar Singh 1976: 14).

In the process of constructing Guru Tegh Bahadur's life and teachings there is an urgent need to look at his own compositions, his epistles (*bukam-nâmās*), and other contemporary sources simultaneously. No historian can afford to ignore his authentic *bānī* ("inspired utterances") recorded in the Sikh scripture, the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*

(GGS). It provides us with a literary evidence in the form of a ‘style of feeling’ that can help us in understanding his life and his role in history, including the contemporary situation of the Sikh Panth. Surjit Hans has skillfully argued that the compositions of the ninth Guru have a simplicity of expression. There is no obscurity in his descriptions, ideas, and expression. These compositions reflect his ‘elemental vision’ of human beings concerning birth, life and death that is the foundation of his religious sensibility, thought, and ideology. This very vision gave him clarity in grasping the political situation of the Sikh Panth that was highly faction-ridden at that time. His reaction, too, had an elemental power. With his anticipation, he was more-than-ready for martyrdom (Hans 1988: 221-227). A superficial reading of Guru Tegh Bahadur’s *bānī* may give the impression that the elemental vision underlies a sense of pessimism, producing the sense of detachment (*vairāg*) in the hearts and minds of both the readers and listeners. However, its careful examination reveals an eternal optimism with an implicit faith in the future.

Guru Tegh Bahadur’s vision is outlined in his compositions, consisting of 59 *shabads* (“hymns”) and 57 *saloks* (“couplets”). The *shabads* are organized in 15 different *rāgas* (“melodies”) and they are meant to be performed in *kīrtan* (“devotional singing”), and thereby “to create a sustained mood, often around a theme stated in the refrain and gradually reinforced in the verses” (Schomer 1979: 79). The *saloks* on the other hand are succinct and sharp, and “they are forceful statements of an experience, a belief, or a strongly held opinion” (ibid.). Guru Tegh Bahadur himself laid emphasis on the performance of *kīrtan* “to sing the divine virtues without which life becomes worthless” (GGS 631, 726, 1426, 1429). He composed the maximum number of twelve hymns in his favorite *Sorambi* raga, a melody that is performed in the first quarter of night. The mood of this raga is light and cheerful with a pleasing sound touching the heart: emphasizing in its performance that the words of the Guru can enlighten the mind in the face of darkness of ignorance by vanishing all fears and filling the heart, mind, and soul with bliss. Guru Tegh Bahadur’s second chosen raga is *Gaurī* in which he has composed nine hymns. This is an evening raga assigned to autumn and its mood is contemplative (Curtiss 1996: 170). The third preferred raga is *Basant* in which he has composed five

hymns, reflecting his joyous attainment of the wealth of the divine Name. This raga belongs to the spring season during which it can be performed at any time of the day or night. Guru Tegh Bahadur's remaining hymns are organized in different ragas in the following sequence: *Āsā* (1), *Dev Gandhārī* (3), *Bihāgarā* (1), *Dhanāsarī* (4), *Jaitsarī* (3), *Todi* (1), *Tilang* (3), *Bilāval* (3), *Rāmakalī* (3), *Mārū* (3), *Sārang* (4), and finally *Jaijāvantī* (4) respectively.

It should be emphasized that *Jaijāvantī* raga is the sole contribution of Guru Tegh Bahadur in the Sikh scripture. No other Guru has employed this melody for his compositions. It is majestic and highly arresting raga that is assigned to the night hours (Curtiss 1996: 178). Its performance is associated with the feeling of victory (*jai jai*) over temptations. Guru Tegh Bahadur had to deal with dark forces in the social arena over which he attained his victory through his noble sacrifice. Notably, the image of death looms large in his compositions and his *saloks* are described by Surjit Hans “as a long poem ‘Waiting for Martyrdom’” (Hans 1988: 226). In fact, his fifty-seven *saloks* can be divided into two sections: the first section (*saloks* 1-52) belongs to an early period in the Guru's life when he was traveling and preaching in different parts of east India, including the Malwa region of the Punjab; the second section of last five *saloks* (53-57) belongs to the critical moment when he made the decision to confront Mughal authorities in Delhi in response to a plea made by a group of learned scholars (*panit*) from Kashmir. He designated his only son, Gobind Das, to the office of Guru through the imprimatur of *salok* # 54 and urged him to include his works in the *Adi Granth* to finalize the canon. In this study we will focus only on five famous *saloks*, numbering 16, 51, 53, 54, and 56 respectively, to explore the following major themes: (1) The spiritual state of fearlessness; (2) Carefree optimism; (3) Powerlessness, captivity, and vulnerability; (4) Power, freedom, and successful strategies; and finally (5) Truth prevails ultimately. Taran Singh brilliantly pronounced the first four of these couplets as *mantakī salok* (“potent verses”), which like the sparks (*changīā[ē]*) had the power to fire the imagination of common people from rural areas to rise against an oppressive regime (Taran Singh 1976: viii-ix). Let us now examine the historical context of Mughal India in which Guru Tegh Bahadur's activities took place.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Guru Tegh Bahadur assumed the office of leadership on August 11, 1664 CE during the reign of Emperor Aurangzeb (r. 1658-1707) who had already become antagonistic towards the Sikh Gurus when he came to know from the Mughal courtiers that the seventh Guru, Har Rai (1630-1661), had helped the fugitive prince Dara Shikoh. He asked Raja Jai Singh of Amber to have the Guru summoned to Delhi. The Guru sent instead his elder son, Ram Rai, along with his minister Dargah Mall, who escorted him. In the Mughal court Ram Rai deliberately misread one of the lines from the *Adi Granth* and strayed away from the teachings of the Gurus against the performance of miracles. When Guru Har Rai came to know about his elder son's moral lapse he immediately designated his youngest son, Har Krishan (1656-1664), as his successor before he passed away at Kiratpur on October 6, 1661 CE. This decision was a direct challenge to Aurangzeb who had kept Ram Rai as hostage in Delhi on the assumption that Ram Rai would be the heir apparent of Guru Har Rai and could be manipulated into bringing the Sikhs under control. Again, the emperor summoned the young Guru to Delhi through Raja Jai Singh who hosted Guru Har Krishan in his bungalow. Anticipating that the emperor would insist that he demonstrate miraculous feats, the Guru refused to meet him in person. Meanwhile, an epidemic of smallpox was raging in the city of Delhi, and the Guru came out of Raja Jai Singh's bungalow to tend the sick. During the service of healing the sick Guru Har Krishan was himself afflicted with the disease of smallpox, which ravaged his tender body. He made the pronouncement of designating his successor as "Bâbâ Bakâle," meaning that the next Guru would be found in the town of Bakala. He was specifically referring to his great-uncle, Tegh Bahadur (youngest son of Guru Hargobind), who lived at the town of Bakala at that time. His sagacious decision once again frustrated Aurangzeb's attempts to bring the mainstream Sikh community under control. Guru Har Krishan passed away on March 30, 1664.

Assuming the office of authority Guru Tegh Bahadur built a new town on the mound of Makhawal in 1665, named after his mother as Chakk Nanaki that became famous as Anandpur. Thereafter, the Guru departed on an extended journey to the east of India. He was,

however, arrested for the first time from Dhamdhan, *parganâ* [an administrative unit in Mughal India] *Bânga*], under imperial orders by Alam Khan Ruhila and brought to Delhi on Wednesday, November 8, 1665 (*Bhram Vahî Jâdâvbansîân*, Harbans Singh 1982: 65). During his detention Kanwar Ram Singh, son of Mirza Raja Jai Singh of Amber, “became a surety for him” (Bhuyan 1947: 162-163) and the Guru was released on December 17, 1665 to resume his interrupted eastward journey. After the death of Mirza Raja Jai Singh on August 28, 1667, Aurangzeb conferred the title and *khilat* on his son, Mirza Raja Ram Singh, who was deputed to lead an expedition into Assam to quell the rebellion of Ahoms. The Rajput Raja marched from Delhi with a fresh army to encounter the Ahoms. His mother, Pushpa Devi, had exhorted him to seek the blessings of Guru Tegh Bahadur in his enterprise. Towards the close of 1668, the ninth Guru met Mirza Raja Ram Singh again in Dacca who requested the Guru to accompany him on his campaign to subdue the rebellious Ahoms in Assam, an expedition in which the Guru eventually “acted as a mediator and brought about reconciliation between the warring forces” (Harbans Singh 1982: 78). In his letters to the congregation at Patna Guru Tegh Bahadur specifically mentioned that he was accompanying “Râjâ [Ram Singh] Jî” towards Assam (*parairâjâjî kesâthgaehân*, “we have gone further [east] along with Râjâ Jî”, see Ganda Singh 1967: 84-85, 86-87).

When the Guru was at Dacca the mother of Bulaki Das of *Sangat* lolâ hired a local artist to draw the Guru’s portrait on which the Guru gave finishing touches with his own hand. This early painting of the ninth Guru from Dacca was reproduced in the beginning of *Guru Tegh Bahadur Commemorative Volume* (Satbir Singh 1975: 15; See Illustration1). Surely, this portrait was painted in the courtly Mughal style, representing the Guru in a royal manner and dignity. The Guru was holding a hunting hawk on his hand, a symbol of aristocracy in those days. The plume on his turban represented the sovereignty of the “True King” (*sachâ pâdishâh*) who ruled over the hearts of the people. It should be emphasized that the works of art provide documentary evidence to make sense of the religious life and cultural context of early Sikh community. Following the *mîrî-pîrî* (“temporal and spiritual” authority) tradition of his father, Guru Tegh Bahadur had assumed the characteristics of a spiritual leader as well as a temporal ruler who had

specific responsibilities to protect righteousness (*dharam*). Unsurprisingly, his royal figure, with a plume setting off his turban and a horse underneath, had an irresistible appeal to his followers, while creating suspicion among the Mughal authorities who read in his activities the danger to established authority (Harbans Singh 1982: 93). Thus, the Sikh notion of sovereignty was a serious challenge to the Mughal state. Let us now turn to the five major themes one by one by placing them in their historical context.

Illustration 1: I took the photograph of “Guru Tegh Bahadur’s Portrait received from Dacca,” reproduced in *Guru Tegh Bahadur Commemorative Volume* published by the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, Amritsar, to mark his 300<sup>th</sup> martyrdom anniversary in 1975. This is a retouched version of the actual painting discovered by Dr. Trilochan Singh in 1958 in the possession of Mrs. Kanchan Devi (Shikar Maa) from the family of Bhai Bulaki Das in Dacca. The family had preserved it for more than 250 years. Its original version was reproduced by Dr. Trilochan Singh in his book *Guru Tegh Bahadur: Prophet and Martyr* published by Delhi Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee in 1967. Its replica is available at both Victoria Museum, Calcutta, and British Museum Library in London.

## 1. THE SPIRITUAL STATE OF FEARLESSNESS

In his works Guru Tegh Bahadur employs the phrase *nirbhai pad* for “the spiritual state of fearlessness.” This is the ultimate state of freedom, peace, and equanimity. The person who has achieved the gift of fearlessness does not grieve in grief and is never affected by pains and pleasures in life. For such a one gold is as good as dust. Rising above praise and blame, and all hopes and desires, one remains untouched by the temptations of flesh and anger. The self of such a person merges with the Divine as water mingles with water. Guru Tegh Bahadur proclaimed this message of fearlessness in his *Soramhi* hymn (GGS 633) in the form of a *vāk* (“commandment”) to his audience when he assumed the office of Guru on August 11, 1664 CE (Satbir Singh 1975: 11). The preamble to the foundational text of the Sikh tradition defines the two most important divine attributes of being “fearless and devoid of enmity” (*nirbhau-nirvair*, GGS 1) enunciated by Guru Nanak (1469-1539), the founder of the Sikh

tradition. Guru Tegh Bahadur's life was a witness to this ideal state of fearlessness in which there was no enmity or hatred for anyone. What he preached was actualized in the events of history. I will elaborate these points by sharing my personal experience of participating in an international conference more than two decades ago on the scope of reforming the criminal justice system.

In August 1998 there was an eight-day research retreat at Sorrento, British Columbia, in Canada, on the fascinating topic of "The Spiritual Roots of Restorative Justice." In addition to academic scholars of various religious traditions, it was attended by the Chaplain for the Correctional Services of Canada, a Judge of Provincial Court of Saskatchewan, Police Officers, representatives of different ethnic groups, schoolteachers, and leaders of native communities in Canada. The project was funded by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the University of Victoria, and some other organizations. This international and interdisciplinary research project was meant to explore what major religions say in text, tradition, and current practice about criminal justice system in general, and Restorative Justice in particular. While criminal justice system is based upon the principle of retribution and the letter of the law, Restorative Justice focuses on the process of healing the victim and the community as well. I made my presentation on "Sikhism and Restorative Justice: Theory and Practice" (Pashaura Singh 2001: 199-216). I vividly remember an episode that took place during my presentation. I was talking about Guru Tegh Bahadur's ideas of a just society depicted in his celebrated couplet on fearlessness:

bhai kâhûA kau det nahinahi bhai mânatân//  
kahunânak suni re manâgi ânâtâhi bakhâni//16//

The one who holds none in fear,  
Nor is afraid of anyone else.  
Says Nanak, listen my mind:  
Acknowledge that one alone as a sage of true wisdom.  
(M9, *Salok* 16, GGS, p. 1427).

This is the ideal state for human beings, both individually and socially. In this condition, "no one submits to highhandedness and

exploitation and no one has the chance to dominate, despoil or demean another. In this state there is no aggression, nor any fear of aggression. Peace is the value prized most: peace is thus ensured” (Harbans Singh 1971: 125). Thus, Guru Tegh Bahadur’s notion of fearlessness is accompanied by compassionate love without any prejudice or hatred for anyone. By contrast, a tyrant can be fearless too, but he is full of hatred for the people whom he wants to oppress by misusing his political power.

During my presentation Dr. Arthur Blue, a psychologist, and an active leader of native professional organizations in Canada and the United States, raised his hand and admired the most significant scriptural passage on fearlessness by Guru Tegh Bahadur, saying “Frighten none and fearnone” is a wonderful statement. To my surprise, the whole audience looked towards him and listened to him patiently when he vented his cry for social justice: “This is what we want. We do not want to be exploited by anyone. We are the masters of this land, but we are treated like slaves.” The audience was stunned. At that point the moderator of the conference intervened and urged me to continue my presentation. I suddenly realized the power of Guru Tegh Bahadur’s revolutionary message that infused the spirit of resistance among the representatives of native people in Canada in modern times. Undoubtedly, the First Nation’s encounter with Euro-Canadians resulted in a trauma that impacted the Aboriginal population, creating fear and uncertainty in their living experience. It is no wonder that they have kept this trauma within themselves most of the time. They only speak about it in hushed comments within the sweat lodges (Blue and Blue 2001: 61). Let us now turn to the original context of Guru Tegh Bahadur’s scriptural passage.

About three and a half centuries ago, the same message of fearlessness by the ninth Guru fired the imagination of the rural population of the Malwa region of Punjab. It posed a direct challenge to Emperor Aurangzeb who had imposed Islamic laws and taxes throughout the empire and ordered the replacement of Hindu temples with mosques. According to *Ma’âsir-i-Âlamgîrî* by Sâqi Musta’âd Khân, the emperor had issued a general order on April 8, 1669 to all provincial governors in which he decreed that all schools and temples of non-

Muslims were to be demolished:

The Lord Cherisher of the Faith learnt that in the province of Tatta, Multan and especially at Benaras, the Brahman misbelievers used to teach their false books in their established schools and that admirers and students both Hindu and Muslim, used to come from great distances to these misguided men in order to acquire this vile learning. His Majesty, eager to establish Islam, issued orders to governors of all provinces to demolish the schools and temples of the infidels and with utmost urgency put down the teaching and the public practice of the religion of these misbelievers (Sirkar 1947: 51-52; Fauja Singh 1977: 68, n. 4; Harbans Singh 1982: 82-83).

In this context, there is firm evidence in old Persian sources about the desecration of Sikh places of worship. For instance, a contemporary Persian source, *Abkâm-i-Âlamgîrî* (MS.), written by Munshi Inayatullah Ismi, records:

Muhammad Aulia, of the town of Buriya, in the *parganâ* of Khizarabad, *sirkâr* Sirhind, reported to His Majesty that, under royal orders, and with the consent of the Qazi, the temple of the worshippers of Nanak [*nânakeprastân*] had been pulled down and a mosque built on the site. Sayyid Zafar was appointed to take charge of that mosque and lead prayers and benedictions. (Ismi, Rampur State Library, MS: 514-515; Harbans Singh 1982: 84-85)

Here, Emperor Aurangzeb was directly dealing with the matter of a Nanak-panthi *dharamsâlâ* that was destroyed by the Mughal soldiers, followed by the building of a mosque on its ruins. Ganda Singh painstakingly compiled such reports from Persian sources about Aurangzeb's antipathy towards the followers of Guru Nanak (Ganda Singh 1949: 73). In this ominous situation Guru Tegh Bahadur was exhorting his followers to acknowledge only such a person as the true sage who frightened none and feared none. His bold message had a deep impact on his audience. As a matter of fact, the rural peasantry had always retained its hereditary love of freedom. The Guru's whole activity in the Malwa region was suspect in the eyes of state news-writers, who perceived it as a danger to established authority. It is no wonder that they sent "alarming reports to Delhi of Guru Tegh Bahadur's travels and of the following he commanded" (Harbans Singh

1982: 93).

## 2. CAREFREE OPTIMISM

Guru Tegh Bahadur infused a new spirit among the rural people of Punjab during his preaching tours. His letters (*bukam-nâmâs*) written to various congregations in east India and Punjab bear testimony to the fact that he was received very well wherever he went. The Guru set up a network of relations between different Sikh congregations (*saegats*) under his authority. The congregations in east India not only served the Panth under his leadership but also became its backbone under his successor (Sagar 2002: 41). In his letters Guru Tegh Bahadur's main concern for the "means of livelihood" (*rozzâar*) of Sikhs in Patna and Benaras to ameliorate their economic condition and their protection in difficult circumstances (*sangat ikâbâhurî hogu*) may be seen in his blessings to those congregations (Pritam Singh 1976: 13-28). He used to address some prominent Sikhs like Bhâi Bamhâ as his sons, to strengthen their local authority. To remove internal dissensions within the competing groups, the Guru raised the status of a loyal Sikh in the eyes of the congregation: "Let the congregation consider Bhai Dyal Das' instructions as the command of the Guru. All their desires shall be fulfilled" (Sagar 2002: 123). His compassion for his favorite horse, Sri Dhar, gifted by Nawab Saif Khan, may be seen from his letter to Benaras congregation, expressing his humane concern for the animal who fell ill: "In the name of the Lord Eternal, addressed to Bhai Jawehri. The Lord shall protect the entire *sangat*. We enjoin upon the *sangat* to look after Sri Dhar. Let him be fed well and let him be conveyed to Patna as soon as he recovers. The *sangat* shall be blessed" (Ganda Singh 1967: 81).

From his letters it is quite evident that Guru Tegh Bahadur was as much concerned with worldly affairs as he was anxious about the spiritual matters of his followers. He always inspired them to cultivate carefree optimism in life, worrying only about those matters which were out of their course. The mundane world is like a road where no one stays forever. Note the following striking couplet:

We should only become anxious  
if something unexpected happens.

This is the way of the world, O Nanak,  
Where nothing is stable or permanent.

(M 9, *Salok 51*, GGS, p. 1429)

The keyword in the present context is *chintā*, which means “care and anxiety.” People experience these worries in their daily lives while participating in worldly affairs. Guru Tegh Bahadur exhorts his audience to be aware of the reality of the world where nothing is permanent. Everything happens according to the divine will, and there is no need to worry at all. People should worry only if something unexpected happens. They should rather put their faith exclusively in the indwelling God who looks after them in their mundane affairs. Thus, by submitting to the divine will cheerfully one can become “carefree” (*achintu*) and can gain confidence to cope with any situation of anguish and despair, because every happening is then seen to be coming from God. The acceptance of anxiety is regarded by the Guru as an act of showing positive attitude towards life. In fine, the immediate impact of Guru Tegh Bahadur’s *salok* on his followers was to make them so resolute and lighthearted (*beparvāh*) that they did not worry about anything while facing the dire circumstances.

### 3. POWERLESSNESS, CAPTIVITY, AND VULNERABILITY

There is a unique title *Doharā* amidst Guru Tegh Bahadur’s couplets (*saloks*) in the Sikh scripture. Why is this *salok* so special that it needed a new heading to represent a pause in the continuous poetic narrative? At this point there is a clear-cut break in the thematic flow of the narrative that separates it from the previous section of couplets. The present *doharā* represents an existential crisis in which the elite group of Brahmins in the Hindu community found themselves under the threat of conversion to Islam during the reign of Emperor Aurangzeb. The original couplet reads:

*Doharā* (Couplet)

The strength is exhausted, and we are in captivity.  
Nothing is going to work at all.  
Says Nanak, the Lord is the only support now.  
May he come to our rescue as he did the elephant.

(M9, *Salok 53*, GGS, p. 1429)

In this new reading we find the description of the pathetic condition of powerlessness and captivity, in which human beings become vulnerable. The keyword *gaj* (“elephant”) in the text refers to a famous story in Hindu mythology. There is a popular legend of *Gajendra Moksha* in which Lord Vishnu (Hari) frees the elephant in trouble. While wandering in the hills, the lord of elephants, Gajendra, felt thirsty and entered a lake in the *Trikumâ* hill. While the elephant was drinking water, a crocodile caught hold of its feet. Finding himself on the brink of death, Gajendra cried out for help by raising his long trunk upwards and pleading Hari to save him. Answering his prayer, Hari flew promptly on *Garu a* (a mythical bird or vulture, half-man, half bird, on which Vishnu rides) and killed the crocodile with his *chakra* (a discus type weapon) to release the animal from its clutches. According to the legend, the elephant was in his previous birth a Pandyan king by name Indrayumna devoted to Hari but cursed by saint Agastya he was born as elephant. Hari blessed Gajendra who ultimately attained liberation (*moksha*) by remembering the divine Name (Dogra and Mansukhani 1996: 150).

This unique couplet illuminates how the *padits* of Kashmir represented their woes to Guru Tegh Bahadur by invoking the story of *Gajendra Moksha* in their plea and how they begged him to “hold their hand” in their distress. A contemporary source, *Bhram Vahî Talaunâ Parganâ Jînd*, provides us with firm evidence that a group of sixteen Brahmins from Kashmir led by Kirpa Ram went to see Guru Tegh Bahadur at Chakk Nanaki (present day Anandpur Sahib) on May 25, 1675:

Kirpa Ram, son of Aru Ram, grandson of Narain Das, great-grandson of Brahm Das, of the house of Thakur Das of Bhardwaj *gotra*, Saraswat Datt Brahmin (Mulal), resident of Matan, *parganâ* Srinagar, Kashmir, came to Chakk Nanaki, *parganâ* Kahlur, on Jeth Sudi Ikadasi 1732 *samvat* / 25 May 1675, bringing with him sixteen leading Brahmins of Kashmir. Guru Tegh Bahadur, the ninth Guru... consoled them (Harbans Singh 1982: 95).

Evidently, a group of Brahminshad met with the Guru at Chakk Nanaki to seek his help against religious persecutions being carried out in the Kashmir valley by its Mughal governor, Iftikhar Khan. Most

interestingly, Guru Tegh Bahadur summed up succinctly the nightmare of those Brahmins in his own striking *Dobrâ*, providing a glimpse of what Harbans Singh adroitly described as “the gathering gloom” in Mughal India during Aurangzeb’s regime. During those gloomy days, the Sikh center at Chakk Nanaki had become a beacon and the refuge of whoever wished to live with faith and dignity (Harbans Singh 1982: 86). After a deep reflection on the situation at hand Guru Tegh Bahadur agreed to do whatever was necessary to defend the people’s right to wear their religious symbols. Before the visiting Brahmins took their departure, the Guru according to the *Gurû Kîân Sâkhiân*, consoled them by saying: “Baba Nanak Ji will protect you” (ibid. 96; Padam 2003 [1986]: 79).

#### 4. POWER, FREEDOM, AND SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES

Guru Tegh Bahadur had been contemplating on the issue of Brahmins from Kashmir for over a month and realized the need for the empowerment of the subjugated people through a strategic plan. To awaken their conscience, he made the decision to lay down his life by confronting the Mughal authorities in Delhi. He was pleased to receive spontaneous positive response from his young son to his resolution to protect the right of the people to practice their faith freely at any cost. According to *Gurû Kîân Sâkhiân* (# 28), Guru Tegh Bahadur assembled the congregation (*sangat*) at Anandpur on *sâvan* 8, *sambat* 1732 / July 8, 1675, and asked Diwan Dargah Mall to bring the customary emblems of succession to consecrate Gobind Das as Guru. The Guru arrayed his son in ceremonial apparel and weapons and seated him in his own place. Diwan Dargah Mall laid the articles in front of Gobind Das and bowed in obeisance. Baba Gurdita, a descendant of Baba Buddha, applied the *tikkâ* (“ceremonial mark”) on Gobind Das’s forehead. Guru Tegh Bahadur spoke: “Brother Sikhs, acknowledge Gobind Das in our place. He who does so will be rewarded. We must now go to Delhi...” (Harbans Singh 1982: 96-97; Padam 2003 [1986]: 79).

Addressing the newly designated Guru, Gobind Das, Guru Tegh Bahadur recited the following couplet to ameliorate the pathetic condition of powerlessness, captivity, and vulnerability. In the context of the political situation of his times, this unique *salok/dobarâ* was his specific answer to the prayers of the elite group of Brahmins in the

contemporary Hindu society:

The strength is restored, and the shackles are broken.

All the strategies are now doable.

O Nanak! Everything is in your hands, Lord.

You are my helper and support.

(M9, *Salok 54*, GGS, p. 1429)

This is a particularly illuminating instance of recitation of this couplet by Guru Tegh Bahadur at Anandpur when he passed on the office of Guru to his nine-year old son, Gobind Das, by providing instructions with an optimistic note to empower the Sikh Panth so that it could break all the shackles of slavery. He used the imprimatur of this *doharâto* transfer his spiritual authority to his only son before leaving for Delhi. The tenth Guru issued this couplet as a commandment (*vâk*) to his audience, resolving to empower the Sikh Panth. It is no wonder that this couplet was recorded in some early manuscripts of the *Adi Granth* under the distinctive symbol of ‘*Mahallâ 10*’ (Pashaura Singh 2000: 73). We will return to this point after looking at the actual practice of transference of authority in the Sikh tradition.

This novel reading of Guru Tegh Bahadur’s couplet is based on the well-established precedent since the beginnings of the Sikh Panth at Kartarpur. First, Guru Nanak transferred his authority to Guru Angad through the imprimatur of the *banôi* and institutionalized the office of Guru to ensure its survival and permanence. Before he passed away in 1539, Guru Nanak recited the concluding *salok* of *Japji* (GGS: 8) while giving final instructions to Guru Angad, who repeated it in the form of a *vâk* or commandment to the congregation. Unsurprisingly, it is written under his distinctive symbol in *Vâr Mâjh* with minor variations (M2//*paunu gurû pânî pitâ mâtâ dharati mahatu...//*, GGS: 146), stressing the continuity and unity of the office of Guru. Second, the third Guru transferred his spiritual authority to his son-in-law by means of the following *salokas* the final instruction: “The Perfect Guru has implanted the divine Name within me, dispelling my doubts from within. I sing the divine Name and the *kârtan* of the divine praises; the divine Light now shines brilliantly to show me the way ...” (M3//*guripûrai harinâmudi[âiâ...]*, GGS: 86-87). Remarkably, this verse is repeated under the symbol of Guru Ram Das as *salok 28* with minor

linguistic variations in *Salok Vārānte Vadbhik* (M4// *guripūraiḥarināmudirāiā...*, GGS: 1424). Proclaiming it as a commandment (*vāk*) to the congregation, the fourth Guru made it the principal source of inspiration while performing *kīrtan* classical melodies during his spiritual reign. He was an accomplished musician who added eleven new ragas to the existing system of nineteen ragas in which Guru Nanak performed.

Third, Guru Ram Das transferred his spiritual authority to his youngest son through the imprimatur of an illuminating stanza (#12, M4// *nānak vīchārāhi sant janchārived kabande//...*) from his *Vār Gaurī*, which Guru Arjan repeated with a slight variation (# 31, M5// *nānak vīchārāhi sant munijanā Achārived kabande//...*) under his distinctive symbol in the same text as *Paurī Mahallā 5* (“Stanza by Guru Arjan”, GGS:316-317). The early occurrence of this stanza (GGS: 306) is ascribed to Guru Ram Das, since the actual ballad belongs to him. Here, one may raise the following questions: Why would Guru Arjan use his father’s composition under his own signatures? What is so significant about this stanza that he repeated it? At the succession ceremony of Guru Arjan his father gave him the piece of advice on how to deal with the detractors. After assuming the office of Guru, the fifth Guru proclaimed it in the form of a *vāk* or commandment. The dominant theme of this stanza is certainly related, first, to the proclamation of the divine Word by the saintly people, and second, to the condemnation of those who do not accept their authority. The last line provides a warning against the threat to the central authority (Pashaura Singh 2000:160-161).

Fourth, Guru Hargobind transferred his spiritual authority to his grandson by means of Guru Arjan’s *salok* as the final instruction: “Keep your hope of succor focused only on the One Divine, my soul, and discard all other hope. Meditate, Nanak, on the divine Name and all your tasks will be accomplished” (*Saloku// dbar jāreikkemektulābibi ānīās//...*, GGS: 257). Guru Har Rai inscribed these words on a piece of paper and issued a commandment (*vāk*) to the congregation. Fortunately, this important historical information is preserved in a manuscript of the *Adi Granth* completed in 1667 CE (*sambat 1724 māghvadīekam 1*) by Jograj, who died in 1671 CE (*sambat 1728*

*maghvadîchauth* 4) on a Sunday. The piece of information given on folio 3b of the manuscript is said to be a copy of Guru Har Rai's writing (*satave mahalkiâAakbarâAkînakal*):

Saloku// dharjîareikkmektûlâhivi ânîâs// nânak nâm  
udhiâtuterekârajuâvabirâs//1//. These words were proclaimed in writing by the Guru at the time of succession to the throne [of Guru Nanak] in the morning hours of Tuesday, in the month of the last days of *pob* [December/January], at Thapul Dera in Sirmor. He who reflects on these words will be blessed. His cycle of birth and death will be broken. This is the Guru's *vâk* (Pashaura Singh 2000: 71).

This note refers to an important moment in Sikh history when Guru Har Rai went to Thapul in Sirmor (Nahan) soon after his succession to the throne of Guru Nanak and proclaimed his first teaching in the form of a *vâk* (commandment). It also throws a considerable light on the well-established tradition of receiving a *vâk* from the reigning Guru. Jograj seems to have felt the need to record this for posterity in his volume of the *Adi Granth*.

Moreover, this note corroborates the testimony of the contemporary Persian chronicle *Dabistân-i-Mazâhib*: “In the year one thousand and fifty-five (Hijri), when Najabat Khan, son of Shah Rukh Mirza, having mobilized an army, under the orders of Shah Jahan, invaded the territories of Tara Chand and made the Raja a prisoner, Guru Har Rai went to Thapul in the territories of Raja Karam Chand near Sirhind” (Ganda Singh 1967: 67-68). Evidently, the seventh Guru did not want to “embroil himself in an armed conflict between the chief of Hindur (Nalagarh) and the Mughal commandants who invaded his territories” (Grewal 1990: 67).

#### **4B. CONTESTING ERRONEOUS ASSUMPTIONS**

Here, I have shared four impeccable instances of a long-lived praxis of the transference of authority to justify my new interpretation of Guru Tegh Bahadur's *salok* # 54 in its original context for the following reasons. In the first place, most of the traditional Sikh sources, namely *Parchîân Sewâdâs* (1708 CE; Kharak Singh & Gurtej Singh 1995: 36, 131-132), *Mahimâ Prakâsh Vârtak* (1741-1773 CE; Bajwa 2004: 176), *Bansâvalî-nâmâ* (1769 CE; Padam 1997: 117-118), *Mahimâ*

*Prakāśh Kavītā* (1776 CE; Vedi 1989: 381-382), and *Sūraj Prakāśh* (1843 CE; Vir Singh 1991: 4460-4463) have attributed this couplet to Guru Gobind Singh as a reply to his father who was assumed to have sent the previous couplet in a letter from Delhi to his son, reflecting his condition before his execution: “My strength is gone, I am in chains. Says Nanak, the only help is God who rescued the elephant in a moment.” Both these assumptions are completely wrong. In this context, Surjit Hans raised the question that “if this sloka is not taken to be anticipatory composition it would mean that God helped the elephant but failed Guru Tegh Bahadur” (Hans 1988: 226). However, Hans omitted perhaps consciously the exegesis of *salok* # 54 in his analysis, because he was not sure of its authorship. Uncritical use of traditional sources has led generations of Sikh scholars to continue to accept this *salok* as Guru Gobind Singh’s response to his father’s final communication (Trilochan Singh 1975: 219-220; Singh and Talib 1975: 195-196, n. 7).

Secondly, there are several manuscripts of the *Adi Granth* in which *salok* # 54 is attributed to Guru Gobind Singh. For instance, Punjabi University Museum Manuscript # 1 was written in 1687 CE (*sambat 1744 māghvadī 1*), during the period of Guru Gobind Singh. It contains one *salok* attributed to the tenth Guru among the couplets of Guru Tegh Bahadur in folio 700b. There is evidence that this manuscript was converted to the Banno tradition. Another example is that of Punjabi University Museum Manuscript # 6, which was completed in 1692 CE (*sambat 1749 sāvān sudī ekam 1*) on a Tuesday during the days of Guru Gobind Singh (See Illustration 3). It is very neatly written, has few corrections, and appears to be in a single hand. There is one couplet attributed to the tenth Guru (*Mahallā Dasavān* [10] // *balubūoban dhan chhumaisabbu kacchu hot upāi* // *sabb kacchu tumare bāth mai tum hī hoisabāi* // 54 //) in folio 576b (See Illustration 4). This manuscript belonged to the Lahore tradition, which was also known as Kangarh or Kiratpur recension of the *Adi Granth* (Pashaura Singh 2000: 72-74, 79-80). Thus, a perception of the tenth Guru being the author of *salok* # 54 was popular among certain groups within the Sikh Panth in the last two decades of seventeenth century.

Finally, G.B. Singh examined a manuscript of the “Complete

Granth Sahib” (*pūran granth sâhib*) in 1915 belonging to the old “loyal Sikh congregation” (*bazūr sikh sangat*) of Dacca / Dhaka, present-day Capital of Bangladesh. He called it Damdama recension (*damdame vâlî bîr*), completed on November 28, 1675 (*sambat 1732 mitiagahan vadî 7*), just seventeen days after Guru Tegh Bahadur’s execution on November 11, 1675. He asserted that this *bîr* was written in Makhoval, a place which is now called Damdama Sahib in Anandpur, and that it was taken by a Sikh belonging to Dacca congregation when Anandpur was attacked by the Mughal forces in 1704. He further claimed that Guru Tegh Bahadur himself gave instructions to three scribes to include his compositions at their proper places in the Adi Granth. His fifty-nine hymns were arranged in different raga sections, with one exception that his four hymns in *Jaijâvantî* raga came after the *Jaitsirî* raga. Guru Tegh Bahadur’s fifty-seven *saloks*, with minor linguistic variations, were placed in *Salok Vârân te Vadbîk* section in the epilogue. One couplet was attributed to the tenth Guru (*Mahalla 10// balubhûobandhanchbummesabbkachbubotiupâi// sabbkachbutumraibâthmai tum hî boi sabâi//*). Since all the unauthorized compositions were available in this manuscript, it belonged to the Banno recension of the Adi Granth (G.B. Singh 1944: 215-234). Similarly, another court-scribe (*darbâri likhârî*), Bhai Haridas, who had started writing the copy of the Adi Granth with the blessings of Guru Tegh Bahadur by including his autograph, completed his volume with all the compositions of the ninth Guru (*Jaijâvantî* raga coming after *Jaitsirî* raga) at appropriated places on *vaisâkhî* day of *sambat 1733* / March 29, 1676 CE. This volume also contained all the extra-canonical compositions of Banno recension (Harbhajan Singh 1981: 117-121, 203).

In sum, Guru Gobind Singh knew perfectly well that *salok # 54* was the composition of his father who gave him as a piece of advice at the time of his succession to the throne of Guru Nanak, and that he himself delivered it as a commandment (*vâk*) to the congregation at Anandpur, creating the impression of his authorship among the audience. The manuscripts of the Damdama *bîr* (“recension”) written under his direct supervision at Anandpur and later at Damdama Sahib in Talvandî Sâbo, attribute *salok # 54* to Guru Tegh Bahadur. For instance, two manuscripts of the Adi Granth, written in *sambat 1739*

(1682 CE) and *sambat* 1748 (1691 CE) respectively, contained the works of the ninth Guru at appropriate places with raga *Jaijāvanti* following the *Prabhāti* mode in the standard way. These two volumes did not contain the extra material of the Banno version (Harbhajan Singh 1981: 121-123). These two manuscripts (with catalogue numbering # 97 and # 14) were housed in the Sikh Reference Library, Amritsar, and were destroyed or stolen in 1984 during Operation Blue Star (Pashaura Singh 2000: 223-224). There still exist several manuscripts of this standard Damdama version around Anandpur and Bathinda area, the main centers of Sikh activities in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. I examined the digital copy of a rare manuscript of Damdama version prepared in *sambat* 1764 (1707 CE) and preserved at *Toshākbhānā* (“Abode of Precious Items”) of Takhat Sachkhand Sri Hazur Sahib Abchalnagar in Nanded, Maharashtra, in which there is no mention of “*Maballa* 10” to reflect the authorship of *salok* # 54 as that of Guru Gobind Singh. Another beautiful “Golden Cover Volume” (*sunabirī bīr*) of this version prepared by Baba Dip Singh in *sambat* 1783 (1726 CE) at Damdama Sahib in Bathinda is preserved at *Toshākbhānā* of Darbar Sahib, Amritsar (Pashaura Singh 2014: 130). Let us now return to the final theme in the sequence of our examination of the ninth Guru’s couplets.

## 5. TRUTH PREVAILS ULTIMATELY

Guru Nanak had declared the ultimate victory of Truth over falsehood explicitly: “Falsehood will come to an end, O Nanak, and Truth will prevail in the end” (GGS: 953). He equated Truth with the divine Name (*satinām*). He further remarked: “Truth is the highest virtue, but higher still is truthful living” (GGS 62). Any dichotomy between spiritual development and moral conduct is not approved in Sikh practice (*Sikhi*). Indeed, truthful conduct (*sachachār*) is at the heart of the Guru’s message. The only way to become truthful is to bring oneself into harmony with the divine Order (*bukam*) by eradicating ego or self-centeredness (*haumai*, “I-ness, my-ness”) through the constant practice of meditation on the divine Name (*nāmsimaran*). In line with Guru Nanak’s teachings, Guru Tegh Bahadur highlighted the everlasting power of truthful living in his final optimistic note:

The divine Name prevails; the saintly people prevail.

The Guru and the Lord of the Universe prevail.  
 Say, O Nanak, how rare are those  
 Who recite the Guru's Mantra in this world?

(M9, *Salok* 56, GGS, p. 1429)

Here, Guru Tegh Bahadur's anticipatory experience reaches the climax of optimism. He envisioned that his martyrdom would not be the end of things. For him, the divine Name, the saintly people, the Guru and God would stay forever. Providing an exegesis of the above couplet, Surjit Hans remarked: "After his martyrdom *nâm*, *sâdhû* and Guru Gobind would stay. The ambiguity in the use of 'Guru Gobind' is significant because it could mean both God and Guru Gobind Singh" (Hans 1988: 227, *emphasis* added). In fact, Guru Tegh Bahadur wanted to dispel any ambiguity about his successor in the face of competing claims made in the past by the pretenders to the office of Guru. He gave his final advice to the congregation through the tenth Guru that the constant remembrance of the divine Name would be the only panacea for all the predicaments (*saEkam*) in life.

#### GURU TEGH BAHADUR'S EXECUTION

According to *Gurû Kîân Sâkhîân*, Guru Tegh Bahadur departed from Chakk Nanaki along with his three companions on July 11, 1675. They stayed for the night at "Guru Har Rai's Fort" (*komgurû barrâi*) at Kiratpur where Dip Chand and Nand Chand, sons of Baba Suraj Mall, came to pay homage. Mata Sulakhani, wife of Guru Har Rai and her daughter Bibi Rup Kaur, grieved when they came to know that the Guru was determined to go to Delhi. Guru Tegh Bahadur, the very embodiment of tranquility, calmed them with words of consolation (Padam 2003 [1986]: 79; Harbans Singh 1982: 97). When the Guru and his companions crossed the stream Sirsa the following day, they were arrested soon after entering Mughal territory in the *parganâ* of Ropar, as described in *Bhamm Vahî Multânî Sindbê*.

Guru Tegh Bahadur, the Ninth Guru, ... was taken into custody by Nûr Muhammad Khân Mirzâ, of Ropar police post, on *sâvan pravishte* 12, *sambat* 1732 / July 12, 1675, at Malikpur Ranghrân, *parganâ* Ghanaulâ, and sent to Sirhind. Along with him were arrested Diwân Matî Dâs and Satî Dâs, sons of Hîrâ Nand Chhibbar, and Dyâl Dâs,

son of Mâi Dâs. They were kept in custody at Bassî Pamhânâ for four months. The pitiless captors imposed many atrocities on the Guru. The Guru abided by God's Will (Harbans Singh 1982: 98; translation slightly amended)

Evidently, the ninth Guru and his companions were kept in custody for nearly four months before they were taken to Delhi in November 1675. Three of his companions – Bhai Mati Das, Bhai Dyal Das and Bhai Sati Das – were put to death before his eyes to frighten him about the terrible consequences of a refusal to accept Islam. When he still refused to abandon his faith, he was publicly beheaded in the main market square of Chandni Chowk close to the Red Fort, on November 11, 1675 (Grewal 2017: 33).

A unique entry of the ninth Guru's death is recorded in an early manuscript of the *Adi Granth* written in *sambat* 1749 (1692 CE), providing us with minute details of the time of the day and place of execution explicitly:

*sammatu 1732 mangharsudî 5 vîrvâribârahgharî din gudareteravî gharî  
de amalsrî sat gurû tegh bahâdur jîsam ânekotwâlîchauteagge/ /*

On the 5<sup>th</sup> light day of moon of *maEghar* in *sambat* 1732 (November 11, 1675 CE), when twelve *gharîs* (i.e., twelve times of the unit of 24 minutes become 4.8 hours) of the day of Thursday had passed, Sri Satguru Tegh Bahadur Ji's light mingled (*samâGe*) with the divine Light during the active duration of the thirteenth *gharî* (i.e., early afternoon) on the platform in front of the Kotwali ("prison" in Mughal times).

The contemporary Sikh community knew very well about the specific details of the ninth Guru's execution. In particular, the usage of the phrase *kotwâlî chauteagge* ("platform in front of the Kotwali") in the text of this entry on the death-dates of the Gurus (*chalitr jotî jotî samâvaG ka*, "Play of mingling of the Guru's light with the divine Light") referred to the famous market square of Chandni Chowk in Delhi where Guru Tegh Bahadur was beheaded in front of the gathered public (See Illustration5). As part of material culture, a magnificent Gurdwara Sisganj in Delhi marks this historical site today. We will have more on the nature of the Guru's execution as a public spectacle later in the text. It should, however, be emphasized that Guru Tegh

Bahadur's martyrdom made the Sikhs bolder who reacted sharply to express their antipathy towards Aurangzeb. The author of *Ma'âsir-i-Âlamgîrî* recorded an incidence in which a "disciple of Guru Tegh [Bahadur] Singh hurled two bricks at the emperor" as he made his way back from Jama Masjid to the Red Fort in Delhi on Thursday, October 27, 1676 (Sirkar 1947: 94; Fauja Singh 1977: 135; Piar Singh 1976: 45).

In a recent study on Aurangzeb, Audrey Truschke provides an imperial perspective that the emperor "had the Sikh guru Tegh Bahadur executed in 1675 for taking up arms against the Mughal state" (Truschke 2017: 38). Later, she acknowledges that the execution is not mentioned in any Persian texts from Aurangzeb's period but still she speculates that it happened "for causing unrest in the Punjab" (ibid. 54). Surely, Guru Tegh Bahadur's message of resistance against state oppression was the sufficient reason for his elimination even though there is no contemporary evidence that he took up arms against the Mughal state. Truschke's skewed account is based upon certain Persian sources written a century after the actual event that invented a counter narrative that the Guru was taken as a brigand who was executed for his rebellious activities. In the commemorative volume on Guru Tegh Bahadur's martyrdom tercentenary anniversary, Ganda Singh questioned the veracity of the Persian text of *Sîyarul-Mutâkberîn* completed in 1781 CE by Mir Ghulam Hussain Khan, by highlighting the historical inaccuracies in the text (Ganda Singh 1975: 35-54; Also see Piar Singh 1976: 47, 68-70).

The contemporary Sikh sources, however, vigorously resist the Muslim claim made in the Persian sources. For Guru Gobind Singh, it was for "the protection of the sacred thread and frontal mark of Hindus that Guru Tegh Bahadur performed a tremendous deed in the Dark Age" (DG 70). The tenth Guru further remarked: "For the sake of righteousness (*dharam*), he performed a unique act by giving his head but not his resolve [to defend the freedom of faith]. He performed this sacrifice for the sake of the pious (*sâdhan*) and did not lose his composure while sacrificing his head" (DG 70). The reference in this extraordinary passage to the "pious" (*sâdhan*) and "righteousness" (*dharam*) would signify that the ninth Guru sacrificed his life to protect

the religion promulgated by Guru Nanak and disseminated by his successors. Again, Guru Tegh Bahadur refused to perform a miracle in keeping with the teachings of Guru Nanak (GGS 6, 14), claiming that “the bogus miraculous tricks of conjurers are shameful for the true devotees of God” (DG 70). When he was given the final option between Islam and death, he chose death deliberately in response to the oppressive policy pursued by “the rulers of Delhi against whom he dashed his mortal frame by performing an exceptional act that no one else could do” (*mhîkarpbordilîs sir prabh purkâpayân// teghbabâdur sîkiriyâkarînâkinhûAân//*, DG 70). Thus, Guru Tegh Bahadur made a supreme sacrifice to defend a general principle of what J.S. Grewal has superbly described as “the freedom of human conscience” (Grewal 2017: 34). For the Sikh Panth, therefore, the ninth Guru’s martyrdom helped to make “human rights and freedom of conscience” central values to its identity.

The usage of modern phrases such as “human rights” and “freedom of conscience” becomes an issue for scholarly discussion because these ideas had not yet become part of popular discourse in pre-modern times. In particular, the notions of freedom of thought and expression became an integral part of scholarly conversation in the western world because of European Enlightenment in late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The contemporary international doctrine of human rights is principally an outgrowth of World War II, resulting in the formation of the United Nations serving as the main vehicle for adopting three key documents – the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), and two international covenants, one on Civil and Political Rights and the other on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights [both 1966] (Ilesanmi: 501). These key documents today constitute an authoritative catalogue of internationally recognized human rights. Notwithstanding the evolution of modern ideas and universal values, there is an urgent need to contextualize Guru Tegh Bahadur’s teachings and sacrifice in a global framework.

A French thinker Francois-Marie Arouet (1694-1778), popularly known by his pseudonym Voltaire, continues to be held in worldwide repute as a courageous crusader against tyranny, bigotry, and cruelty. His work is celebrated for its critical capacity, wit, and satire, and it vigorously propagates an ideal of progress to which people

of all nations have remained responsive. His long life spanned the last years of classicism and the eve of the revolutionary era of Enlightenment. During this age of transition his works and activities influenced the direction taken by European civilization. As a French Enlightenment writer, historian and philosopher Voltaire was known for his attacks on the established Catholic Church, and his advocacy of freedom of religion, freedom of expression, and separation of church and state (Pomeau 2021: *Encyclopedia Britannica* online). Much before the US Constitution enshrined the principle of free speech in the very First Amendment, Voltaire had said, "I may not agree with what you have to say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it" (Mankoff 2015). This is the most significant Voltairean statement on free speech that has become the foundational principle of liberal democracy.

Almost two and a half centuries before the dawn of European Enlightenment Guru Nanak had advocated the values of human equality (GGS 2, 6, 349, 504, 730), social justice (GGS 74, 723, 1240), gender equality (GGS 473), human rights (GGS 141), self-respect (GGS 142), and speaking Truth to Power by raising one's voice against tyranny (Pashaura Singh 2020: 1-19). He was vastly ahead of his times. In this context, W.H. McLeod aptly remarked that "Guru Nanak's words carry us well beyond the conventional view of his time or, for that matter, the present time as well" (McLeod 1997: 242). His successors faithfully followed his message of cultivating the spirit of eternal optimism by being "fearless and devoid of enmity" (*nirbhau-nirvair*) simultaneously. At the age of nine Guru Nanak refused to wear the "sacred thread" at the traditional ceremony of becoming the member of the twice-born class of Hindu society formally, providing him with an opportunity to criticize external ritual and to affirm inward cultivation of ethical virtues of compassion, contentment, modesty, and truth as comprising the true sacred thread of the soul (GGS 471). Interestingly, Guru Tegh Bahadur's nine-year-old son, Gobind Das, inspired his father to protect the right of Brahmins to wear their sacred threads and frontal marks. The Guru did not simply give verbal assurance to Hindu *panits* to defend their right to wear their sacred symbols, he laid down his life for their cause. A century later Voltaire assured his opponent verbally that he will defend to the death his right to free speech even though he

did not agree with him. However, Voltaire did not die for anybody or for his principle of free speech. He was just talking the talk, while the ninth Guru was walking the walk a century earlier. Thus, from global perspective Guru Tegh Bahadur's martyrdom acquires an incomparable position in the annals of world history.

### CONCLUSIONS

In this study I have contextualized the five celebrated couplets of Guru Tegh Bahadur and offered their novel readings. These texts originated in the historical context of Aurangzeb's rule in which he imposed Islamic laws and taxes on non-Muslims and ordered the replacement of Hindu temples with mosques. Guru Tegh Bahadur delivered his message of fearlessness without hatred or enmity towards anyone during his travels in the Malwa region of Punjab. His growing popularity among the rural people became a matter of grave concern for the intelligence agencies in Mughal India who sent alarming reports to Delhi. Meanwhile, a group of Brahmins from Kashmir who were under the threat of conversion to Islam approached Guru Tegh Bahadur at Anandpur and besought his help by invoking the story of Gajinder *mokṣa* from Hindu mythology. The Guru consoled them and made the decision to confront the Mughal authorities in Delhi. He designated his only son to the office of Guru and instructed him to empower the Sikh Panth so that it could break the shackles of slavery. He gave specific instructions to him along with the scribes at Anandpur to include his compositions at appropriate places in different raga sections and the epilogue. He delivered the message of hope, optimism, and faith in the face of persecution by the Mughal authorities.

One of the outcomes that emerge from this analysis is the diversity of the Sikh Panth during this period reflected in the popularity of three recensions of the Adi Granth among the competing groups. The Damdama recension consisted of the original Kartarpur text prepared under the direct supervision of Guru Arjan in 1604 plus the works of the ninth Guru. The Lahore recension differed from the Kartarpur version only in its concluding section. It had a different order, sometimes ending with the *saloks* ("couplets or stanzas") of Kabir and Farid, and sometimes with the panegyrics by the Sikh bards in praise of the Gurus. In 1642, a Sikh named Banno traditionally

prepared another recension of the *Adi Granth* at Khara Mangat in Gujrat district. The Banno *bī* consisted of the Kartarpur text plus some unauthorized additions. It originated at a time when the main center of Sikh activities shifted from Amritsar to Kiratpur under Guru Hargobind who had to withdraw to the Shivalik hills due to the pressure of Mughal authorities. The central place of Amritsar fell into the hands of *Mīnās* (“Scoundrels”), the followers of Prithi Chand (Guru Arjan’s elder brother) and his descendants. The Banno group swayed the later Sikh literary tradition with its dominant narrative that *salok* # 54 was the reply of the tenth Guru to his father’s letter he wrote from the prison in Delhi as if it were so easy to communicate so fast in those days in late seventeenth century. This narrative originated from the presence of the title of “*Mahallā* 10” in the Banno recension of the *Adi Granth* completed in 1675 soon after the ninth Guru’s martyrdom, a title which may have been consciously inserted by the scribe to lend weight to this story. Unsurprisingly, stories circulate fast in any community because of their simplicity and popular appeal than the complex historical facts. On Guru Tegh Bahadur’s 300<sup>th</sup> martyrdom anniversary scholars nurtured in the Singh Sabha mode of rational interpretation started questioning this dominant narrative and accepted the ninth Guru’s authorship of *salok* # 54 (Gurcharn Singh 1975: 77-78; Satbir Singh 1975: 131-132; Taran Singh 1976: xvi). Here, the noteworthy point is that the manuscripts of the *Damdama bīr* written under the direct supervision of Guru Gobind Singh did not have the title “*Mahallā* 10” to reflect his authorship of *salok* # 54 (For instance, see the *Damdama Bir* prepared in 1707 preserved at Hazur Sahib, Nander). Thus, the tenth Guru closed the canon after including the works of his father that were given to him before he left for Delhi.

Guru Tegh Bahadur’s public execution took place in the premodern age of an absolute monarch in India. In his influential work *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault provides us with a model of punishment for public ritual from 17<sup>th</sup> century France, explaining the dynamics of power in premodern societies. The punishment had its logic or rationale. Power belonged to the king and when one of the king’s subjects acted against him, the infamy of his crime had to be ‘written’ on his body through torture. Punishment in this manner was a way of signaling to or performing for the people both the power of

the king and the consequences of opposing it. For Foucault, public execution was to be understood as a political ritual, because it did not re-establish justice, rather it reactivated power (Foucault 1979: 34-35, 47-49). However, Foucault's model of punishment has already come under criticism from J.R. Knott, who maintains that it "does not address the kind of *agon* [struggle; contest] one finds in the accounts of religious suffering" (Knott 1992: 9). In the case of Guru Arjan's tortures, for instance, Foucault's model cannot be applied completely because his execution was not a public spectacle. In fact, the Mughal authorities themselves felt 'powerless', fearing a public backlash because of his high spiritual reputation (Pashaura Singh 2006: 232). By contrast, Guru Tegh Bahadur's and his three companions' executions were public spectacles. Whereas Jahangir had written his order to execute Guru Arjan in his memoirs, *Jahāngīr-nāmā* (Thackston 1999: 59), Aurangzeb had completely kept every order in this regard secret. Muhammad Ahsan Ijad in his Fragment of the *Farrukh Siyār-nāmā* recorded that Emperor "Alamgir had issued the *farmān* for Tegh Bahadur's arrest, but the order was kept secret" (cited in Harbans Singh 1982: 98). This was the principal reason why Guru Tegh Bahadur's execution was not mentioned in any Persian texts from Aurangzeb's period, since the emperor used to censor the histories initially produced in his court before his declaration to limit their production in 1669 CE (Kulke 2016: 122). The willful silence in contemporary Mughal records has forced Louis E. Fenech to use caution that "Guru Tegh Bahadur was executed, if not under the direct orders of the emperor, then certainly with emperor's approval, put to death as he was in front of the imperial edifice of the Lal Qila or Red Fort, in Shahjahanabad [Delhi], an enduring symbol of the military and cultural might of the Mughal empire" (Fenech 2021: 29). It is ethically incumbent upon modern historians to pay critical attention to the conscious suppression of evidence by the powerful to erase the histories of the victims from subaltern groups.

It is instructive to note that a segment of Muslim community venerated Guru Tegh Bahadur with utmost reverence in Mughal India. According to later Persian sources, a Muslim *faqīr*, who witnessed the mingling of Guru Tegh Bahadur's blood in dust at Chandni Chowk, wailed in pain by saying: "The emperor has not done right and the

whole country will come to ruin and Delhi will be destroyed” (Gurbakhsh Singh 1975: 109). *Amansabdâr* of five thousand soldiers, Nawab Saif Khan and his *begam*, mourned the execution of the ninth Guru by wearing black robes for forty days. Even Darogâ Khawâja Abdullâ of the *Kotwâlâ* left his job after the Guru’s execution and went to Anandpur to stay in the court of Guru Gobind Singh (ibid.). The ordinary people who were under the influence of Chistiya Sufi order, felt the agony of the Guru’s execution. Unsurprisingly, the mystic poet Bullhe Shah (c.1680-1758), a contemporary of the tenth Guru, described Guru Tegh Bahadur in Islamic terminology as a *ghâzî* for “the warrior for faith,” reflecting the high spiritual reputation of the Guru due to his noble sacrifice in the contemporary Muslim community (Shackle 2015: 74-75, 226-27, 412n.2). Thus, Guru Tegh Bahadur’s martyrdom should not be considered as the result of any Sikh-Muslim conflict of that period. Rather, it resulted from the oppressive policies of a fanatic ruler who believed in his own exclusive brand of Islam.

In sum, Guru Gobind Singh described his father’s martyrdom as a “unique event” in which he gave his head but not his resolve to defend the freedom of faith by refusing to embrace Islam. In this context, Wilfred Cantwell Smith has tellingly remarked that “the attempt forcibly to convert the ninth Guru to an externalized, impersonal Islam clearly made an indelible impression on the martyr’s nine-year old son, Gobind, who reacted slowly but deliberately to eventually organizing the Sikh group into a distinct, formal, symbol-patterned, bounded community” (Smith 1981: 191). Tradition holds that some of the Sikhs who were present at the scene of Guru Tegh Bahadur’s execution shrank from recognition, concealing their identity for fear that they might suffer a similar fate. To respond to this new situation, the tenth Guru resolved to impose on his followers an outward form that would make them instantly recognizable. Following his father’s last instructions to empower the community he restructured the Sikh Panth and instituted the *Khâlsâ* (“Pure ones directly under the jurisdiction of the Divine Sovereign”) on Vaisâkhî Day 1699, an Order of loyal Sikhs bound by common identity and discipline. The creation of the Khalsa by the tenth Guru was unique in two senses: first, it invited all Sikhs to join the Order of the Khalsa regardless of their background, and second, it had a coherent vision of political sovereignty. All Sikhs

were encouraged to become spiritual warriors of righteousness (*dharam*) engaged in a struggle against tyranny, social injustice, and economic exploitation. They were infused with a new spirit to help the weak and confront the powerful. They were further inspired to establish the sovereign rule of the Khalsa. A new era of political and social awareness dawned with Guru Gobind Singh, “not as a departure from Guru Tegh Bahadur but as a step forward” (Hans 1988: 227). Guru Nanak’s fundamental message of cultivating in life the values of human equality, self-respect, justice for all, human dignity and fearlessness found its practical expression in the lived experience of the Khalsa. Thus, Guru Tegh Bahadur’s martyrdom laid the foundation of modern ideas of defending the universal values of freedom of conscience and human rights, much before the dawn of European Enlightenment.

#### DEDICATION

The essay is my humble tribute to Guru Tegh Bahadur *ji* on the auspicious occasion of 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his martyrdom.

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## TAT KHALSA & BANDAI KHALSA: A CONCOCTED STORY

DR HARJINDER SINGH DILGEER\*

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In this article Dr Harjinder Singh Dilgeer has taken exception to the views of Rattan Singh Bhangu and Giani Gian Singh about the wives of Tenth Guru having been won over by the Mughal Emperor Farukhsiyar against Baba Banda Singh Bahadur. Dr Dilgeer has also tried to remove some more misgivings about the landmark events in the meteoric life of the great Sikh hero. - Editor

Ratan Singh Bhangu and Giani Gian Singh have said that Farukhsiyar compelled (Mata)<sup>1</sup> Sunder Kaur and (Mata) Sahib Kaur (the wives/widows of Guru Gobind Singh) to write letters to the Sikhs asking them to reject Banda Singh. According to these writers, in September 1714, Farukhsiyar imprisoned/interned these ladies and compelled them to ask/order Banda Singh to stop the war against the Mughal regime. As wished by the Mughal emperor, the ladies tried to convince Banda Singh, but he refused to accept their advice. At this, Farukhsiyar asked the ladies to write letters to the Sikhs asking them to dissociate themselves from Banda Singh. These sources further assert that when Banda Singh still did not bother, the ladies 'excommunicated'

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him; but, on the other hand, the Sikhs gave full cooperation to Banda Singh and did not bother about the letters of the ladies because the Sikhs had observed Ajit Singh Palit's loyalty to and collaboration with the Mughals, and (Mata) Sunder Kaur and (Mata) Sahib Kaur used to live with Ajit Singh Palit in Delhi. So, the Sikhs had no confusion about the credentials of Ajit Singh Palit as well as the two ladies; hence, they sided with Banda Singh.

### **TRUTH ABOUT THE 'DISPUTE' BETWEEN BANDA SINGH AND BINOD SINGH**

Some writers have narrated the 'dispute' between Banda Singh and Binod Singh in long detail. According to Ratan Singh Bhangu, Banda Singh and Binod Singh had developed differences right from the time of the occupation of Sarhind. He says that the Mughals arrested Ajit Singh Palit and then took him with them, and he was granted control of Guru-Da-Chakk (Amritsar). After this, they (the Mughals) got a letter written from the wife (Bhangu does not mention the name of the lady; however, it is widely believed that it should be Mata Sunder Kaur, the elder one) of Guru Gobind Singh to Banda Singh; this letter said: 'you have taken revenge for the murder of the Sahibzadas and have punished the hill rulers; so now you should stop the war, accept a jagir (estate), and live a comfortable life'. According to Bhangu, Banda Singh did not bother about this letter; rather, he reacted by saying: 'accepting a jagir from the Mughals would be like committing suicide. I was not struggling to take any revenge (from the Mughals), nor do I intend to rule; I am just carrying out the order of Guru Gobind Singh to bring an end to tyranny.'

Ratan Singh Bhangu takes this crisis further into the following year: now, Mata (wife of the Guru) writes letters to the Sikhs asking them to stop supporting Banda Singh; according to Ratan Singh, she even curses Banda Singh. Here, he (Ratan Singh) shows Binod Singh breaking away from Banda Singh, followed by a battle between the forces of Binod Singh and Banda Singh at the village of Kohali, where Banda Singh loses the battle. Ratan Singh further writes that after this, the Binod Singh faction (Bhangu calls them Tat Khalsa<sup>2</sup>) had entered into a compromise with the Mughals. The latter granted them jagirs, jobs, and other facilities. On the other hand, after his defeat at

the hands of Binod Singh, Banda Singh moved towards Gurdaspur, and the Tat Khalsa established its headquarters at Guru-Da-Chakk. Now, they (Tat Khalsa) became 'touts' of the Mughals, chased him (Banda Singh), and finally got him eliminated.

Another writer, Giani Gian Singh, blames the wife of the Guru for this division among the ranks of the Sikh nation:

*Through mother the Turks created division in the Panth  
It resulted in trouble for the Sikhs;  
That they had to bear for forty years.*<sup>3</sup>

According to Giani Gian Singh, Bhai Mani Singh and several others asked Mata not to do so:

*Mani Singh, Sahib Chand, Nand Lal, etc.  
Did ask: O mother, do not create division in the Panth.*<sup>4</sup>

Giani Gian Singh and Ratan Singh Bhangu both assert that when the emperor came to know about the division in the Panth, he lit lamps with ghee (clarified butter):

*When Farukhes (Farukhsiyar), the emperor, came to know this,  
He held a feast by lighting lamps with ghee.*<sup>5</sup>

Ratan Singh Bhangu's writing makes the emperor declare that the Mother 'saved him' by weaning Sikhs away from Banda Singh:

*Shah (emperor) said, 'mother saved me;  
She made the Sikhs part from Banda Singh.'*<sup>6</sup>

But Mughal and other contemporary sources do not even refer to any such phenomenon of dispute between Banda Singh and the wives of the Guru, nor even mention any such person as Binod Singh; there are several references to Ajit Singh Palit's collaboration with the Mughals, but there is not even the slightest direct or indirect reference to the mother/lady in any record.

Historian Hari Ram Gupta writes that the emperor had arrested both the wives of the Guru; but he too has not quoted any primary or secondary source.<sup>7</sup>

However, there is no doubt about the role of Ajit Singh Palit, who had become loyal to the Mughal regime; he had been visiting the royal court in Delhi to prove his loyalty; the Mughals too accepted him as their 'man' and, from time to time, presented him with gifts. He

visited the Mughal court even after the martyrdom of Banda Singh. On 7 August 1716, just three months after the execution of Banda Singh, he appeared before Farukhsiyar and received a present of a turban from the emperor.<sup>8</sup>

So far as the question of Binod Singh is concerned, there is no evidence in any source. The only reference available is that on 9 July 1714, Farukhsiyar received information that 'Baj Singh (not Binod Singh) had parted from Banda Singh and a large number of soldiers also went with him'; here too, Baj Singh has not been presented as joining, collaborating with, or conspiring with the Mughals; rather, he has been shown as fighting against the Mughal army (it seems that Banda Singh might have sent him to open a second front in order to divide the Mughal forces into two parts). On the other hand, it has been claimed by Ratan Singh and Giani Gian Singh that Binod Singh parted from Banda Singh due to a dispute over strategy regarding taking refuge in Gurdas Nangal fortress when they were under siege by the Mughal army. This cannot be true, as exit from the fortress of Gurdas Nangal was simply impossible because thousands of Mughal soldiers had surrounded the fortress on all sides; hence, none could have escaped without a compromise with the Mughals, which was unthinkable. If Binod Singh had left Banda Singh before entering the fortress at Gurdas Nangal, before the siege, this could be possible; but even this could not have led to enmity with Banda Singh or to collaboration with the Mughals. As mentioned earlier, there is not even the slightest reference to the fact that any Sikh, other than Ajit Singh Palit, had any association with the Mughals.

The first person to create the term 'Tat Khalsa' was Sarup Das Bhalla, the author of *Mehma Parkash*. Ratan Singh Bhangu seems to have followed Sarup Das Bhalla, and Giani Gian Singh added more gossip to the story of Ratan Singh Bhangu.

Ratan Singh Bhangu went to the extent of stating that the Mughal emperor had given Kahan Singh Trehan, Miri Singh, Fateh Singh, and Sham Singh Naurangwalia, etc., the command of a five-hundred-strong army; every horseman was given thirty rupees a month, infantry was paid fifteen rupees per month<sup>9</sup>, and the leaders were given one hundred and fifty rupees each month; some of the 'Tat Khalsa' soldiers had

their headquarters at Guru-Da-Chakk (Amritsar), and the Mughal regime used to pay them five thousand rupees per month (at another place he mentions the amount as five hundred rupees per day); besides, the regime had given them the grant of the pargana of Jhabal as well. Ratan Singh Bhangu writes that the Tat Khalsa had sent its army to save Lahore from an attack by Banda Singh. He further says that the Tat Khalsa army defeated him (Banda Singh) at Kohali and saved Lahore from the Sikhs' wrath:<sup>10</sup>

Kahan Singh parted from Banda (Singh)  
And had a deal with the Turks.  
Rupees five hundred daily was fixed.  
He had five hundred horsemen with him.<sup>11</sup>

But, with the exception of Ratan Singh (Giani Gian Singh's information is based mainly on Ratan Singh's work), no Sikh or Muslim writer has made even a passing reference to any such phenomenon. Neither *Akhbarat-i-Darbar-i-Mualla* nor any other source has referred to the Tat Khalsa phenomenon. Kamvar Khan (*Tazkiratut Salatin Chugatta*), Mohammed Ahsan Ijaad (*Farukhsiyar Nama*), Khafi Khan (*Muntakhabul Lubab*), Mirza Mohammed Harsi (*Ibratnama & Tarikh-i-Mohammedi*), Chaturman (Chahar Gulshan), Shiv Das (*Munavar-ul-Kalam & Farukhsiyar Nama*), Ghulam Hussain Khan (*Siyarul Mutakbrin*), Al-ud-Din (*Ibratnama*), Sohan Lal (*Umdatut Twareekh*), Bute Shah (*Tarikh-i-Punjab*), Khushwaqt Rai (*Twareekh-i-Sikhan*) have given detailed accounts of the history of this period, but none of them have mentioned even the term Tat Khalsa or Binod Singh's role.

#### **'DISPUTE' OF TAT AND BANDAI AND BHAI MANI SINGH**

After the martyrdom of Banda Singh, the next three years were almost a period of blackout for the Sikhs; no Sikh was supposed to be found in any city, including Guru-Da-Chakk (Amritsar). In 1719, when Farukhsiyar, the Mughal emperor, was blinded and later killed by the Sayyad Brothers, it was a period of uncertainty in the Punjab too. The Governor of Lahore also stopped taking interest in expeditions against the Sikhs. After a couple of months, Mohammed Shah Rangila became the new emperor. He was least concerned with the Sikhs' affairs. Now, the Sikhs again began visiting Guru-Da-Chakk, and by 1722, the town was again an abode of a few hundred Sikhs; besides, a large number

of Sikhs began visiting Amritsar after harvesting their crops in March and October.

There were no two groups among the Sikhs till 1722; hence, there was no so-called Tat Khalsa or Bandai Khalsa up to 1722. In 1723, the Sikhs at Guru-Da-Chakk (Amritsar) were divided into two blocs. It was, in fact, a dispute between the group headed by Amar Singh Kamboj (referred to as Bandai) and the Trehan family<sup>12</sup> (referred to as Akal Purkhiay<sup>13</sup>). According to the author of Shaheed Bilas, Amar Singh wanted Banda Singh Bahadur to be considered as the Eleventh Guru, whereas Sangat Singh, Miri Singh, etc. (the Akal Purkhiay) asserted that 'it is the command of Guru Gobind Singh that only Guru Granth Sahib is to be accepted as Guru'.<sup>14</sup> Both groups had been trying to win over the Sikhs, and it was feared that the Sikh religion might be divided into two different sects. When this was reported to Mata Sunder Kaur in Delhi, she sent a letter to Bhai Mani Singh asking him to resolve the problem.<sup>15</sup>

On 18 October 1723, Bhai Mani Singh mediated a compromise between these groups, i.e. the Amar Singh group (an old companion of Banda Singh and his associates Sangat Singh and Lahora Singh) on one side, and the Trehan group (Lahora Singh, etc.) on the other side. However, one thing is crystal clear: it was a local dispute, it originated in 1723, and it had nothing to do with the days of Banda Singh Bahadur.

It is further interesting to note how this dispute was resolved. Bhai Mani Singh took two papers, wrote the names of the leaders of each group on them, and dipped them in the tank of Darbar Sahib. The paper with the name of the *Akal Purkhiay* group appeared first. But the other group still refused to surrender; hence, it was decided that there should be a wrestling match between the wrestlers of both groups. This competition too went in favour of the Akal Purkhiay. Now, the Bandais finally accepted their defeat and became a part of the mainstream. Bhai Mani Singh got a swine slaughtered and cooked. Sangat Singh and his companions shared the meat. They also gave up wearing clothes of red colour and again adopted the Khalsa blue dress.

To sum up, the story of Mata Sunder Kaur's collaboration with the Mughals and her letters against Banda Singh, as well as the 'dispute'

between Banda Singh and the so-called Tat Khalsa, had been concocted much after the martyrdom of Banda Singh. The first person to propagate this was Sarup Das Bhalla (in *Mehma Parkash*). Ratan Singh Bhangu and Giani Gian Singh added new gossip to Sarup Das's fiction.

### **OTHER ALLEGATIONS AGAINST BANDA SINGH**

Ratan Singh Bhangu, etc., have also mentioned that Banda Singh was indicted for disobeying the Guru's instructions and because of some other lapses. In fact, none of these allegations is true, and some of them are even against Sikh philosophy. For example, one allegation is that "the Guru had asked Banda Singh not to get married." This is against Sikh fundamentals; the Guru could never have asked him to live a lifestyle (i.e. not marrying) which is contrary to Sikh philosophy. The second allegation—that he presented himself as Guru—is also wrong; he never behaved as more than a general of the army. It is remarkable that he never presented himself or behaved even as a king or ruler, or even as the chief of the Sikh Panth; he, rather, used to call himself a 'ghulam of the Guru' (literally: slave of the Guru). He captured Samana and appointed Fateh Singh as its Governor; he gave the reins of Sarhind to Baj Singh and Thanesar to Ram Singh. He did not sit on any 'throne' but stationed himself as a general in Lohgarh fort, where he stocked and got arms and ammunition manufactured.

Banda Singh used to address even a common Sikh as Singh *ji*, as if he were addressing a senior (and not a junior); he never treated himself even as a boss. Such was his humility, politeness, and feeling of brotherhood, which could not even be equalled by the Sikh leadership of the next generation (except that of Darbara Singh, Nawab Kapur Singh, Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, Jassa Singh Ramgarhia, Baghel Singh). Irvine, in his book *Later Mughals*, wrote: "*A Choobra (scavenger) or a Chamar (cobbler), which are considered lowly of the lowliest among the Hindus, had only to appear before the Guru (Banda Singh), and after some time he would return to his village as a ruler (of his area).*" [Non-italics, in parenthesis, are mine – Author].

Before beginning any activity or launching any action, he used to pray to the Guru and God; similarly, he used to attribute all his victories and successes to God. This declaration was even inscribed on the coin issued by him:

*Sikka zaad bar bar do aalam, tegh-i-Naanak wahib ast.*

*Fateh Gobind Singh shah-i-shabaan fazal-i-sacha sahib ast.*

(Meaning: With the blessing of the True Lord, this coin is issued in the two worlds. Guru Nanak's sword is the granter of everything. With the blessing of God, Guru Gobind Singh, the emperor of emperors, has been victorious).

*Similarly, his first declaration of victory stated:*

*Azmat-i Naanak Guru ham zaahiro ham batan ast.*

*Padshah din-o-dunian aap sacha sahib ast.*

(Meaning: Inside and outside, everywhere, it is the glory of Guru Nanak. The True Lord is the master of temporal and transcendental domains).

These two wordings (statements) unequivocally affirm that Banda Singh considered the Sikh rule as the empire of Guru Nanak Sahib and Guru Gobind Singh, and not his own. Even in his seal, he attributed all his victories, achievements, and power to the Guru Sahibs:

*Degh-o-tegh-o-fateh-o-nusrat bedirang.*

*Yafat az Naanak - Guru Gobind Singh.*

(Meaning: Wealth, power, and all victory have been achieved without delay, with the blessing of Nanak – Guru Gobind Singh).

Nowhere did Banda Singh even wish to be acknowledged as having achieved anything himself, as was done by Maharaja Ranjit Singh, who, having spent a small amount (out of the rich treasure achieved through the sacrifices of thousands of Sikhs) on gold-plating Darbar Sahib, got his name cleverly inscribed on the main gate of Darbar Sahib. (It is remarkable to note that about half of the gold at Darbar Sahib had been donated by the Bhangi Misl, but their name does not appear anywhere). Besides, Ranjit Singh got himself addressed as Singh Sahib (literally: Master/Lord of the Singhs) and tried to give himself almost the status of a Guru.

Banda Singh was such a Sikh that he used to ask others also to meditate upon the name of God, obey His will, be dedicated to the Guru, and live life according to Gurmat (i.e. the Guru's teachings). A letter, claimed to have been written by him to the Sikhs of Jaunpur, reads:

*“It is the command of the True Lord (not Banda Singh) that the Guru shall be the protector of all the Sikhs of Jaunpur. Meditate upon the name of the Guru. You are the Khalsa of the Timeless (God)... obey the Khalsa Rabit (code of conduct)... keep loving relations with each other. It is my command that God will help those who obey the Khalsa Rabit (not Banda Singh’s).”* [Non-italics, in parenthesis, are mine, for explanation – Author].

Banda Singh’s act of marrying (once or twice) was in no way against Sikh fundamentals (rather, it was the correct action); a Sikh is expected to live the life of a householder and must not be a bairagi or udasi. This, however, does not mean that a Sikh cannot remain a bachelor; if a Sikh wishes to live his life (like Bhai Gurdas) without marrying, he may choose to do so; but otherwise, instead of having extra-marital relations or illicit affairs, marriage is the right choice for a Sikh.

Likewise, to say that Banda Singh ever wished himself to be treated as Guru is grave injustice to him; he never behaved as a Guru or anything like one; there is not even the slightest reference to such an act by him. It is also wrong to say that he changed *Wahoguru ji ki/di Fateh* into *Fateh Darshan*<sup>16</sup>; he did choose *Fateh Darshan* as a war cry. In fact, on 10 May 1710, when the Mughal army reached the battlefield at Chappar Chiri, they began raising slogans/war cries of *Allah hu Akbar*, and in response Banda Singh and other Sikh generals coined an equally befitting war cry, *Fateh Darshan*; the sound of this war cry resembled the Mughal war cry, and its echo had a similar effect on the battlefield.<sup>17</sup>

The truth is that after initiation and spending one full month with Guru Gobind Singh, Banda Singh had become a real, genuine, and practising Sikh; it is a grave injustice to him, and to history, to level such allegations against a person who had been leading a grand life with a large following, but renounced all this to become a true Sikh. It is sheer ingratitude to devalue such a great hero who made such a significant contribution to the Sikh nation and to humanity. It is a grave injustice against such a great general and martyr, and against humanity. Moreover, he could have lived a luxurious life simply by embracing Islam. He refused to renounce his faith and accepted the most heinous torture in history. If, even then, he is to be labelled a

non-genuine Sikh, then there cannot be any better Sikh than him on this earth.

It seems that the so-called sahibzadas' section (Sarup Das Bhalla), in order to establish themselves as successors of the Gurus (or even to be considered as Gurus), and/or to establish their superiority and gain undue respect (and offerings/donations) from the Sikh people (and/or to make the Sikhs forget their collaboration with the Mughals), did this injustice to Banda Singh in the name of the so-called Tat Khalsa and Bandai Khalsa. This is a rape of history and an act of ingratitude.

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#### REFERENCE

1. Mata literally means mother. Mata has been used as prefix to the wife/wives of Gurus. In this chapter, the words mata or mother or ladies refer to the wives of Guru Gobind Singh.
2. But the name Tat Khalsa does not appear in any contemporary writing, neither in Sikh writing nor in Mughal book or records, neither in any Punjabi nor in Persian nor in English or any other writing. *Sabeed Bilas* (by Sewa Singh, 1790) uses the term Bhujhangi and Akal Purakhiay (and not Tat Khalsa) for this group. According to Shaheed Bilas too, the dispute between the Akal Purakhiay and Bandais arose only in 1723, and, there was no such phenomenon during the time of Banda Singh
3. Giani Gian Singh, *Panth Parkash*, Chapter 54, couplet 2.
4. Ibid, Chapter 53, couplet 12.
5. Ibid, Chapter 53, Couplet 3.
6. Ratan Singh Bhangu, *Prachin Panth Parkash*, p. 137.
7. Hari Ram Gupta, *History of the Sikhs*, p 25.
8. Entry of *Akbbarat-i-Darbar-i-Mualla*, dated 7.8.1716
9. At that time, the salary of a Mughal soldier was four rupees per month.
10. Ratan Singh Bhangu, *Prachin Panth Parkash*, pp 134-37 & 162-63.
11. *Shabeed Bilas*, stanzas 142, p.81.
12. They were the children and grandchildren of Binod Singh and

Kahan Singh, the direct descendants of Guru Angad.

13. The author of Shaheed Bilas used the term Akal Purkhiay for Binod Singh group and Bandai for Amar Singh group. In one stanza the author of Shaheed Bilas has mentioned the Akal Purakhiay as Nihang also (stanza 149). Ratan Singh Bhangu has used the term Bhujhangi also (Ratan Singh Bhangu, p. 169). Bhujhangis literally means children, here the direct descendants of Guru Angad. Tat Khalsa term was also a concoction by Sarp Das Bhalla and adopted from him by Ratan Singh Bhangu and Giani Gian Singh.
14. *Shaheed Bilas*, stanzas 142, 145, pp. 81, 82.
15. *Shaheed Bilas*, stanzas 143, p.82, Ratan Singh Bhangu, p 222.
16. *Jo bole so nibaal, akaal akaal akaal bole so nibaal, sat sri akal* too is a later development) was available then too, but it was too long, and, fateh darshan was short, hence easy to use in battle-field. Some scholars reject even this view that he had coined the war-cry '*Fateh Darshan*'. They believe that this too might be propaganda by anti Banda Singh section or by the Mughals. But, this term has been referred to even in the Persian writings.
17. Elliot and Dowson, vol VII, p 414.

## LIFE AND LEGACY OF PROF SAHIB SINGH

DR PARAMJIT SINGH\*

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Getting birth in a particular family is not in one's hands. No one knows how it is decided where one will be born and when. It is only after birth that you know in due course of time what you have inherited.

I consider myself to be very fortunate to be born in the extended family of Prof Sahib Singh who, by his hard work, determination, dedication and scholarship, translated Sri Guru Granth Sahib (*Adi Granth*) – the spiritual book of Sikhs – in easily understood Punjabi language which was published in ten volumes enabling the devotees to understand Gurbani, together with several other books. Before doing this, he thoroughly studied and decoded the entire grammar in Gurbani which could help explaining the meanings of the apparently similar words appearing in the *Adi Granth* at different places.

Prof Sahib Singh, born as Nathu Ram in an extremely poor Hindu family on February 16, 1892 in village Fattewali, Tehsil Pasrur, District Sialkot (now in Pakistan), was my grandfather. He was the eldest of the three sons and three daughters of his father, Heera Nand, who shortly after his birth moved the family to nearby village Tharpal and started a small grocery shop there. The children born before him in the family did not survive so, on some elders' advice, they put a *nuth* (nose ring) in his nose which was later removed at his wedding.

His earliest teacher was Mian Hayat Shah who was son of the famous Sufi poet, Hashim Shah, who once adored the *darbar of* Maharaja Ranjit Singh. He passed his fifth class from the village Primary

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School in Rayya Tehsil in 1902, where Kazi Jalaluddin was the headmaster who was immensely impressed by the confidence, intelligence and performance of the child Nathu Ram. The first glimpse of his confidence was seen on the day of joint inspection of the neighbourhood schools when he was in class 1. The inspector got very annoyed on some issue with the Headmaster, Kazi Jalaluddin, and instructed him to stay away from the premises. Being the smallest in the class, child Nathu Ram, was made to sit in the beginning of the rows, where all the very scared children were seated, and was furiously asked by the inspector to recite table of three and the confident child with equal pitch recited it fluently and correctly pleasing the inspector so much that he immediately called back the headmaster and congratulated the child in his presence. His father also was present there and felt elated, naturally.

Kazi ji always encouraged his father to send the child for further schooling and thus despite his extreme poverty he decided to put the child in Vernacular Middle School in village Gota Fatehgarh. There again he performed so well that his teacher Pandit Shiv Dyal recommended to his father that the child must be sent to High School at least for Matric.

Another episode projecting his confidence and focussed learning is from class 6 when the teacher, Pandit Shiv Dyal, asked the students to identify the jumbled alphabets written on the black board. He was the only one in the whole class to do it correctly and thus earned goodwill, blessings and inspiration from Pandit ji.

In January 1905, he appeared for his Middle examination which was held in Sialkot city for all the students of all the four Middle Schools in Sialkot district. Sialkot city from *Gota Fatehgarh*, where he was studying, is about 42 miles covering about half on foot to *Pasrur* carrying all the books and other necessary belongings, and the remaining by a *Yekka* ride. With the kind of frail health he had it was not an easy task for him, but he did it! He topped in the entire Rawalpindi division securing 613 marks out of 800 earning six rupees per month scholarship as against four normally given. This facilitated his joining High School in Pasrur despite the very poor financial condition of the family. Pasrur is about 20 miles away from the village

where the family lived.

For quite some time he had developed a keen desire to get baptised and become a Sikh having been inspired from the looks of Sikh soldiers he often saw on his way to school. In September 1906 a relative's visit, who had impressive long flowing beard, did the final click. He took the child Nathu Ram and his friend Tulsi Ram for baptism in a *Amrit-Sanchar* camp organised by *Singh Sabha* in the nearby village *Klasswala*. The organisers did not agree for it as both the boys had short hair but in view of their strong desire and determination they agreed. And, then the names also had to be changed as per Sikh tradition, but both the boys said that they had already chosen their names and as such no formal procedure was required. Their determination won again and thus Nathu Ram became Sahib Singh and Tulsi Ram became Jagjodh Singh.

As a child he did not have good health and was confronted with serious ailments such as typhoid fever when in class 3 and again chicken pox in class 4, but he survived these attacks miraculously. Health-wise he was the weakest and the shortest child in his class and his teacher often used to taunt him: "Nathu Rama, in future your children and grandchildren may have to use poles to pick fruit from eggplants".

When he returned back from Sialkot after the Middle examination, he found the family preparing for his wedding which was solemnised on January 25, 1905, when he had not even completed 13 years of age. His wife, Durga Devi (later renamed as Agya Kaur after baptism) was barely 11 then. Marriages at that young age were a common feature then.

In view of Sahib Singh's interest and excellent performance in studies, his father got him admitted in *Pasrur* High School, even though it meant for his father going far beyond his means. During his School days at *Pasrur*, the major communities of the town – Muslims, Christians and Hindus (*Arya Samajis*) – once organised a common congregation to promote awareness and highlighting importance of their respective faiths. The *Arya Samaj* preachers were, in their daily discourses, reciting Sanskrit *shlokas* which left a profound effect on Sahib Singh's mind, and he decided to swap *Pharsi* with Sanskrit as a subject in ninth class although only three months were left in the final examination. Despite

all advisory from his friends and seniors he did not budge and topped the class in Sanskrit leaving behind all those who had studied it for around four years. This was another example of his confidence and determination.

He lost his father on July 20, 1907, when he was just 15 with his two brothers at 13 and 11 who had now to look after the business and bear the whole responsibility of the family which included his three sisters, mother and wife. His father, while on the death bed, very thoughtfully had instructed the family to ensure Sahib Singh's studies up to at least Matric. His both brothers also had been baptised – Labh Singh and Dewan Singh – during the lifetime of his father.

Though born in extreme poverty and confronted with numerous difficulties and ailments Sahib Singh was always fortunate to have bestowed on him blessings, support and inspiration of his teachers and well-wishers. With the outbreak of malaria in Punjab in 1909 the schools were closed in Punjab for a month and Sahib Singh also got trapped in its fold. Soon it was time to send registrations and examination fee for the Matric examination. His teacher, Pandit Vitsata Parsad, sent a special messenger for him who took him, under his care, to Pasrur while still having fever. Pandit ji arranged his stay in the School Boarding House of which he was the warden also, and meals for him were provided from pandit ji's house!

Then came the question of paying examination fee, but the family had no money to pay for it. Although they had a small grocery shop but were always under debt. This time help came from his father's sister, who was a widow, borrowing some money by mortgaging part of her jewellery. He topped his class in Matric with Sanskrit as a subject despite his illness, thus fulfilling his father's last wish. His younger brothers' contribution in this direction set a unique example. It was a practice in those days to pool in 20 kg of wheat flour per month for every resident of hostel. The two younger brothers used to carry it on their heads every month covering 40 miles both ways on foot. What a dedication it was!

Sahib Singh was very eager to pursue further education, but the family was not able to support it, so he found a teaching job in a school at Sangla, near Lyallpur in September 1909 at a monthly salary

of rupees 15 which lasted only up to April 1910, and he could save just about rupees 25 which he handed over to the family. That was his first job!

His search for job continued; he visited Lahore, he visited Amritsar, approached his known contacts for help but nothing worked out, and he writes:

“.....ਆਖਰ ਆਸ ਮੁੱਕਾ ਕੇ ਇਕ ਦਿਨ ਮੈਂ ਰਾਮਬਾਗ ਦੇ ਇਕ ਰੁੱਖ ਹੇਠ ਬੈਠ ਕੇ ਬੜਾ ਰੋਇਆ, ਬੜੇ ਗਿਲੇ ਕੀਤੇ ਪਰਮਾਤਮਾ ਅੱਗੇ, ਤੇ ਉਸ ਨੂੰ ਆਖਿਆ - ਆਹ ਲੈ ਫੜ ਮਾਲਾ ਆਪਣੀ, ਮੈਥੋਂ ਭੁਖਿਆਂ ਭਗਤਿ ਨ ਹੋਵੇ।”

While at Sangla he had been reciting Gurbani *Shabads* (hymns) at Gurudwara under the inspiration of Giani Gian Singh ji.

He further writes:

“ਪੌਣੇ ਦੋ ਮਹੀਨੇ ਖੱਜਲ ਹੋ ਕੇ ਮੈਂ ਅਪਣੇ ਘਰ ਵਾਪਿਸ ਆ ਗਿਆ। ਪਰ ਵਿਹਲਾ ਕੀ ਕਰਾਂ? ਹੱਟੀ-ਪੱਟੀ ਦਾ ਕੰਮ ਕਰਨਾ ਮੈਂ ਜਾਣਦਾ ਹੀ ਨਹੀਂ ਸਾਂ। ਸਾਡੀ ਕੋਈ ਭੁਇੰ ਦੀ ਮਾਲਕੀ ਵੀ ਨਹੀਂ ਸੀ ਤੇ ਨਾ ਹੀ ਕੋਈ ਹੋਰ ਜਾਇਦਾਦ ਹੀ ਸੀ। ਹਾਂ, ਸਾਡੀ ਇਕ ਜਾਇਦਾਦ ਸੀ - ਗਰੀਬੀ, ਗਰੀਬੀ, ਗਰੀਬੀ। ਇਹ ਗਰੀਬੀ ਮੂੰਹ ਪਾੜ ਕੇ ਸਾਨੂੰ ਦਿਨ ਰਾਤ ਡਰਾਂਦੀ ਸੀ।

He applied for a job in postal department and got the interview call; borrowed 2 rupees from the house cleaning lady and set out on foot to cover 40 miles distance for the interview at Sialkot. Describing his tough painful journey he writes: “.....

“ਮੈਂਨੂੰ ਅੱਜ ਸਮਝ ਆਈ ਕਿ ਅਸੀਂ ਗਰੀਬ ਹਾਂ। ਮੈਂਨੂੰ ਅੱਜ ਪਤਾ ਲੱਗਾ ਕਿ ਗਰੀਬ ਕਿਵੇਂ ਗਲੀਆਂ ਵਿੱਚ ਕੱਖਾਂ ਵਾਂਗ ਰੁਲਦੇ ਹਨ।”

On the way, in Pasrur, dead-tired he lay down on pavement in front of school hostel where he was spotted by one of his former teachers, Pargat Singh, who on knowing his distress story kept him at his house for the night, gave him some money and put him on a *yekka* enroute to Sialkot next morning.

To his good luck he succeeded in getting the clerical job in postal department and joined as a clerk in December 1910 at rupees 20 monthly salary. Unlike at Sangla he was no more fond of *Kulfis* but had become more serious and responsible worrying always about the family debts. He started sending rupees 18 every month to his brothers retaining just rupees 2 for himself. Soon it dawned upon him that continuing with this meagre salary he may only barely pay off some

interest alone and the principal would keep standing as such never allowing them to leave the clutches of four major money lenders identified as - Budha Singh and Sant Singh from *Fattewali*, Maghi Shah from *Gabrumal*, and Pandit Ram Kishan from *Tharpal*. He saw that even rupee 2 borrowed in 1908 for his matric examination fee, and the money borrowed in 1905 for his wedding also still stood as such, including several other borrowings from time to time for family expenditures. Better planning was a clear and ambitious but risky signal to him.

He started dreaming and planning for resuming college studies. His school-time friends, Muhammad Asharf from *Matte Ki* and Ram Rakha Mal from *Jeeun Bhinder*, who had joined a college in Lahore were telling him inspirational stories from college. Enjoying college life was not his dream but to free his family from the knee-deep debts was his concern and worry which could be done if he earned at least a graduation degree.

He wrote a long painful letter to his former teacher and well-wisher, Pandit Vitsatta Parsad who promptly replied to ensure his college education. Now was the time to resign from a government job which he had got after a great struggle. He writes:

“ਬੜੇ ਕਸ਼ਟ ਝੱਲ-ਝੱਲ ਕੇ ਮੈਂਨੂੰ ਰੁਜ਼ਗਾਰ ਮਿਲਿਆ ਸੀ। ਜੇ ਕਾਲਜ ਵਿੱਚ ਪੜਨ ਜਾਣਾ ਸੀ, ਤਾਂ ਇਸ ਰੁਜ਼ਗਾਰ ਨੂੰ ਲੱਤ ਮਾਰ ਕੇ ਹੀ ਜਾਣਾ ਸੀ। ਮੈਂਨੂੰ ਘੜੀ-ਮੁੜੀ ਖਿਆਲ ਆਂਉਦਾ, ਕਿ ਜੇ ਖਰਚ ਵਲੋਂ ਅਧਵਾਟੇ ਰਹਿ ਗਿਆ, ਤਾਂ ਫੇਰ ਕੀ ਬਣੇਗਾ? ਲੋਕਾਂ ਵਲੋਂ ਫਿਟਕਾਰ ਤੇ ਅਗਾਂਹ ਵਾਲਾ ਤੌਖਲਾ - ਇਹ ਦੋਵੇਂ ਮੈਂਨੂੰ ਮੂੰਹ ਪਾੜ-ਪਾੜ ਕੇ ਡਰਾਣ ਲੱਗ ਪਏ।”

But he decided to resign. With trembling hands, he wrote down few lines in his resignation which was accepted. He further writes:

“ਜੂਆ ਹੀ ਸੀ, ਜੇ ਪਾਸਾ ਸਿੱਧਾ ਪੈ ਗਿਆ ਤਾਂ ਪੌਂ ਬਾਰਾਂ ਹੋ ਜਾਣਗੇ; ਪਰ ਜੇ ਪਾਸਾ ਪੁੱਠਾ ਪਿਆ, ਤਾਂ ਮੈਂ ਕਿਸੇ ਥਾਂ ਜੋਗਾ ਨਹੀਂ ਰਹਾਂਗਾ।”

Amidst a very emotionally charged family atmosphere, he left for Lahore on September 6, 1911, to join Dyal Singh College for F.A. studies. Pandit Vitsatta Parsad ji got him some new dresses and arranged for his admission with half fee concession in the college. Luckily, he found another school-time classmate, Hardial Singh, in the same class who requested his elder brother to send him five rupees more every

month for Sahib Singh. Like that he always found generous people in his contacts who helped him financially to keep going ahead in his studies. During his second year at college, he was awarded a monthly scholarship of rupees 5 from Chief Khalsa Dewan, Amritsar also on the recommendation of the College Principal. In May 1913 he appeared in F.A. final examination and was placed on the fourth position in the university.

His first son, Kartar Singh, was born on April 9, 1912, while he was in college hostel preparing for the examination and came back home in June. Everyone was happy and admired his courage, commitment and dedication.

With this success in F.A. examination, a scholarship of rupees 10 per month was assured together with full fee concession for continuing his studies in B.A. He planned to join Government College, Lahore for his further studies.

Right from his days as second master in School at Sangla, he had been regularly going to gurudwara, reciting *path*, *kirtan* and even attempting *katha*, and was very impressed by Bhai Gian Singh who used to give several meanings/explanations of Gurbani verses. By a strange coincidence on one day of August 1913 when during an interaction with an Arya Samaj Preacher near his village who had taunted him saying:

“ਤੁਸੀਂ ਸਿੱਖ ਲੋਕ ਫ਼ਖਰ ਨਾਲ ਇਹ ਆਖਦੇ ਹੋ ਕਿ ਤੁਹਾਡੇ ਗੁਰੂ ਨੇ ਤੁਹਾਡੇ ਵਾਸਤੇ ਤੁਹਾਡੀ ਅਪਣੀ ਬੋਲੀ ਵਿਚ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ ਲਿਖਿਆ ਹੈ। ਪਰ ਤੁਹਾਡਾ ਹਾਲ ਇਹ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਇਕ ਇਕ ਸ਼ਬਦ ਦੇ ਕਈ ਕਈ ਅਰਥ ਕਰਦੇ ਹੋ ਤੇ ਕਈ ਅਰਥ ਕਰਨ ਵਾਲੇ ਨੂੰ ਬੜਾ ਵਿਦਵਾਨ ਸਮਝਦੇ ਹੋ। ਕੀ ਇਹ ਵਿਦਵਤਾ ਹੈ ਜਾਂ ਬੇਸਮਝੀ?”

Following this he resolved to solve this enigma and replied to Pandit ji:

“ਪੰਡਿਤ ਜੀ! ਇਸ ਵੇਲੇ ਤੁਹਾਡੀਆਂ ਇਹਨਾਂ ਟੋਕਾਂ ਦਾ ਉਤਰ ਦੇਣ ਜੋਗਾ ਮੈਂ ਨਹੀਂ ਹਾਂ। ਫੇਰ ਵੀ ਨਿਸ਼ਚਾ ਰੱਖੋ ਕਿ ਤੁਹਾਡਾ ਧਾਰਮਿਕ ਜੁਲਾ ਅਸੀਂ ਦੂਜੀ ਵਾਰੀ ਆਪਣੀ ਧੌਣ ਉੱਤੇ ਨਹੀਂ ਪੈਣ ਦਿਆਂਗੇ।

He was just 21 at that time.

He joined B.A. classes in Government College, Lahore in September 1913 where he was taking keen interest in Sanskrit, regularly going to gymnasium for exercises, and also Gurudwara Dehra Sahib

early morning. His Professor of Sanskrit, Gulbahar Singh, was very impressed by his performance. He topped the College in Sanskrit and was awarded a silver medal by Punjab University. His professor persuaded him to go on for M.A. in Sanskrit but because of the heavy debt on the family and pressure from the money lenders he had to decline this lucrative offer.

Now he again set out in search of job and the target was to clear the family from all debts! And, he found a teacher's job in Khalsa School, Farooka (Dist Sargodha) at 75 rupees salary with additional rupees 20 as hostel warden's responsibility, joining it on September 8, 1913. And, on 7<sup>th</sup> September his second son, Partap Singh, was born, while he was travelling to Farooka, who grew up to be my father.

He was very popular with students in the school as he was also guiding them in sports particularly for the tug-of-war and hockey games, besides actively participating in *path* recitation and *kirtan*. Another Khalsa School in the neighbourhood offered him to be its Headmaster but he thankfully declined as he was looking towards a position in Khalsa College, Gujranwala which was then expected to start functioning shortly.

After serving Khalsa School, Farooka for about 20 months with his last drawn salary rupees 98, leading very frugal life he had completely cleared all his family's debts. He resigned and joined Khalsa College, Gujranwala on May 4, 1917 at monthly salary of rupees 70, much less than in his previous job, but he was heading for a new experiment. The fear of debt was not there anymore on his mind!

Few days later he lost his mother almost ten years after his father in 1907.

His third son, Hardial Singh, was born on April 10, 1918. Soon after it, Punjab was gripped in the influenza epidemic which attacked him also badly. College was closed. He was alone in Gujranwala with no one to take care of him. But luckily, one God sent student at the College came to see him and looking at his plight stayed with him for couple of days till he got better. Some of his family members also were caught in its clutches but fortunately all survived though it claimed more than 3 lakh lives in Punjab alone.

In February 1920, Sardar Jodh Singh joined the College as its Principal and framed new scales for its staff. Sahib Singh was given the scale 75-5-125 which greatly disappointed him and he put forward his resignation. During the ensuing conversation between the two, Prof Sahib Singh said:

“ਇਹ ਕਰਤਾਰ ਦੇ ਰੰਗ ਹਨ ਕਿ ਸਰਦਾਰ ਜੋਧ ਸਿੰਘ ਜੀ ਖਾਲਸਾ ਕਾਲਜ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤਸਰ ਵਿੱਚ ਧਾਰਮਿਕ ਪੜ੍ਹਾਉਣ, ਤਾਂ ਉਹਨਾਂ ਨੂੰ ੧੫੦-੧੫-੩੦੦ ਦਾ ਗ੍ਰੇਡ ਮਿਲੇ, ਪਰ ਜੇ ਗਰੀਬ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਸਿੰਘ ਗੁਰੂ ਨਾਨਕ ਕਾਲਜ ਗੁੱਜਰਾਂਵਾਲੇ ਵਿੱਚ ਧਾਰਮਿਕ ਪੜ੍ਹਾਏ ਤਾਂ ਉਸ ਨੂੰ ਕੁਝ ਹੀ ਨ ਮਿਲੇ।”

This speaks of his very upright personality and truthful outspoken nature! Accepting his arguments, the grade was revised to 120-8-200. Subsequently, he received extremely significant guidance along with many useful references from S. Jodh Singh which initiated him to put in his best efforts to understand Gurbani and on the path to rise. He always felt obliged and indebted to him for this.

On the martyrdom day of Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur ji in December 1920 while being alone in the evening on *Path* recitation duty in the Khalsa School, Gujranwala, he was confronted with a word in three different forms on Ang 965 of Sri Guru Granth Sahib:

ਆਹਰ ਸਬ ਕਰਤਾ ਫਿਰੈ, ਆਹਰੁ ਇਕ ਨ ਹੋਏ।  
ਨਾਨਕ ਜਿਤੁ ਆਹਰਿ ਜਗੁ ਉਚਰੈ, ਵਿਚਲਾ ਬੁਝੈ ਕੋਇ॥

Though he continued recitation, but his mind got engrossed to understand the meaning of the three different forms of the same word, and he writes:

“ਮੈਨੂੰ ਵਿਆਕਰਣ ਦਾ ਇਕ ਨਿਯਮ ਲੱਭ ਪਿਆ। ਸੰਨ ੧੯੨੦ ਦੇ ਦਸੰਬਰ ਵਿੱਚ ਗੁਰੂ ਤੇਗ ਬਹਾਦਰ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਦੇ ਸ਼ਹੀਦੀ ਗੁਰਪੁਰਬ ਦੇ ਸਮੇਂ ਮੈਨੂੰ ਇਸ ਦਾਤ ਦੀ ਪ੍ਰਾਪਤੀ ਦਾ ਮੁੱਢ ਬੱਝਿਆ।”

S. Jodh Singh was immensely impressed by his scholarship, dedication and commitment that on reading his essay “*Dharam te Sadachar*” he remarked:

“ਜੇ ਤੂੰ ਇਸੇ ਰਾਹ ਪਿਆ ਰਿਹਾ, ਤਾਂ ਕਿਸੇ ਦਿਨ ਗੁਰਮਤਿ ਦਾ ਚੰਗਾ ਲਿਖਾਰੀ ਬਣ ਜਾਏਗਾ।”

#### ANOTHER PHASE IN HIS LIFE AND CHANGE OF JOB

It first needs some necessary background description. There had

been a gradual decline in the services rendered in the upkeep of gurudwaras by its clergy *Mahant* which led to the formation of Gurudwara Managing Committees and the Shiromani Gurudwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) in 1920. He was also included as a member of the committees for gurudwaras “*Babe di Ber*” in district Sialkot and “*Rori Sahib*” in Emnabad.

The first violent reaction to this step was seen in terms of ‘Saka Nankana Sahib’ on February 20, 1921, wherein the *Mahant* of Gurudwara Nankana Sahib ruthlessly killed several members of a visiting Sikh Akali Jatha. Annoyed Sikhs from all over proceeded towards Nankana Sahib including Prof Sahib Singh from Gujranwala. Delay tactics, on official advisories, followed by transporters kept the protestors stranded here and there for several hours before reaching the site giving free hand to the *Mahant* and his accomplices.

Once in Gurudwara they found several partially burnt and unburnt dead bodies scattered all around with unbearable stink all over. In the meantime, the Government had, however, handed over the keys of the complex to the Sikh committee officials.

Soon after another adverse development took place. The anger and protests had also been simmering in the hearts of people of the region after the brutal massacre of Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar in April 1919 on the Vaisakhi Day. This got fanned further by the visit of Congress leaders Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya and Mahatma Gandhi to participate in the protest rallies and big conferences planned in Amritsar and Lahore, which eventually got shifted to Khalsa College, Gujranwala as Section 144 was clamped in the other two cities.

The resultant effect of this was that the College got disaffiliated from Punjab university in June 1921 and no fresh admissions were allowed, giving strong signal of uncertainty for staff’s future.

On May 23, 1921, he became father fourth time, this time a baby girl, Narinder Kaur, who grew up to marry Prof Pritam Singh, another doyen of Punjabi language and literature, and father of Prof Jai Rup Singh, former Vice Chancellor of Guru Nanak Dev University and Central University of Punjab, Bathinda, and Dr Harshinder Kaur who is world famous as a doctor, author, orator and crusader of feminine

rights.

In this backdrop of uncertainty and increasing family responsibility he contacted Master Tara Singh who was by that time appointed as Secretary of the SGPC and facilitated his appointment as Joint Secretary which he joined on July 20, 1921, and resigned from Khalsa College, Gujranwala. During his tenure at SGPC he witnessed famous *Morchas* such as '*Chabian da morcha*', '*kirpan da morcha*', '*Guru ka bagh morcha*' and '*Jaito da morcha*'.

Several members of SGPC were arrested during *Guru ka bagh morcha* including Prof Sahib Singh who was the authorised signatory for all communications in his capacity as Joint Secretary; but the then DC, Amritsar, J.M. Dunnet always thought him to be the part of organisers because he was seeing only his signatures! This, in a way proved for him as a blessing in disguise. He started investing all his free time in jail in search of Gurbani Vyakarana. During this time his fifth child, Amrik Singh, was born on December 23, 1922. His family was now staying at Amritsar.

The British Government already had faced much humiliation during the three *morchas* and was looking for a new opportunity to oppress and defunct the Sikh Akalis. Some trivial issue sparked a Hindu-Muslim conflict on April 13, 1922. Both the government and the opposition expected that Sikhs would jump in and then face the consequences. But they were all disappointed. He writes:

“ਪਰ ਵਿਚਾਰੇ ਦੇਖੀਆਂ ਦੀਆਂ ਆਸਾਂ ਉੱਤੇ ਪਾਣੀ ਫਿਰ ਗਿਆ। ਸਿੰਘ ਸੰਭਲ ਗਏ। ਉਹ ਇਸ ਜਾਲ ਵਿਚ ਨ ਫਸੇ। ਹਿੰਦੂ ਤੇ ਮੁਸਲਮਾਨ ਭਰਾਵਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਆਪੋ ਵਿੱਚ ਲੜਨ ਤੋਂ ਰੋਕਣ ਲਈ ਸਿੰਘ ਡਟ ਗਏ। ਸ਼੍ਰੋਮਣੀ ਗੁਰਦਵਾਰਾ ਪ੍ਰਬੰਧਕ ਕਮੇਟੀ ਦੇ ਆਗੂਆਂ ਨੇ ਸੋਹਣੀ ਅਗਵਾਈ ਕੀਤੀ। ਕਮੇਟੀ ਨੇ ਦਸ-ਦਸ ਪੰਦਰਾਂ-ਪੰਦਰਾਂ ਸਿੰਘਾਂ ਦੇ ਖਾਲੀ-ਹੱਥ ਜੱਥੇ ਸ਼ਹਿਰ ਦੇ ਗਲੀਆਂ ਬਾਜ਼ਾਰਾਂ ਵਿੱਚ ਚੱਕਰ ਲਾਣ ਲਈ ਭੇਜ ਦਿੱਤੇ। ਆਗੂ ਆਪ ਇਹਨਾਂ ਜੱਥਿਆਂ ਵਿੱਚ ਸੱਭ ਤੋਂ ਮੁਹਰੇ ਸ਼ਾਮਿਲ ਹੁੰਦੇ ਸਨ। ਇਸੇ ਤਰਾਂ ਦਫਤਰ ਦਾ ਸਟਾਫ ਵੀ ਜਾਂਦਾ ਸੀ, ਤੇ ਮੈਂ ਵੀ।”

He continues:

“੧੫ ਅਪ੍ਰੈਲ ਦੀ ਅਖਬਾਰ ਟ੍ਰਿਬਿਊਨ ਦੇ ਪਹਿਲੇ ਹੀ ਸਫੇ ਉੱਤੇ ਮੋਟੇ ਅੱਖਰਾਂ ਵਿੱਚ ਸਿਰ-ਲੇਖ ਸੀ ... ਸ਼ਹਿਰ ਅਕਾਲੀਆਂ ਦੇ ਹੱਥਾਂ ਵਿਚ ਹੈ। ਆਪਣੀ ਪੁਲਸ ਨਾਂ-ਕਾਫੀ ਆਖ ਕੇ ਡਿਪਟੀ ਕਮਿਸ਼ਨਰ ਡਨਿਟ ਨੇ ਵੀ ਸ਼੍ਰੋਮਣੀ ਕਮੇਟੀ ਪਾਸੋਂ ਮਦਦ ਮੰਗੀ ਸੀ। (ਮੇਰੇ ਵੇਲੇ ਇਹ ਚਿਠੀ ਦਫਤਰ ਵਿੱਚ ਸਾਂਭ ਕੇ ਰੱਖੀ ਹੋਈ ਸੀ)।”

It is hoped that SGPC has preserved this letter as part of its archives. It is so heartening to know from this episode the role of Sikh Akalis and the SGPC played in resolving the Hindu – Muslim conflict at that time!

He was again arrested on the intervening night of October 11 and 12, 1923 while taking part in *Jaito da morcha*. This again provided him free time to resume the pending Gurbani Vyakarana project. All the prisoners from Amritsar were shifted to Lahore Fort for security reasons on March 3, 1924, where his chronic Piles problem got aggravated and soon after he was released from the prison on medical grounds. For the next couple of months, he stayed on rest while fighting and undergoing treatment for Piles, dividing his time between his village house at Tharpal and Amritsar. He again miraculously escaped from its clutches!

The *Jaito morcha* was continuing. Ultimately the Government agreed to handover the administration of gurdwaras to SGPC simultaneously approving the SGPC Act on July 9, 1925, with the consent of all leading imprisoned members in Lahore Fort at that time.

Prof Sahib Singh's natural bent of mind was academic! It was only by a turn of circumstances that he ended up in SGPC where he worked as its Joint Secretary for almost seven years, though not a work of his choice but he served this responsibility with utmost sincerity, honesty and integrity. Even then he utilised his free time in understanding Gurbani and studying its Vyakaran as during his imprisonment twice.

In the meantime, struggling all these years Khalsa College, Gujranwala, also had come back on rails and on approaching the then Principal, Bawa Harkishan Singh, he was offered to join back to teach Sanskrit, Gurbani, Punjabi and Hindi to FA/FSc classes at a monthly salary of Rs 150 as against Rs 250 that he was drawing from SGPC. He accepted and joined the College on September 13, 1927. Such a steep dip in his salary was harsh on him as by now he had a big family to support but he looked for job satisfaction which was more important to him!

On November 1, 1926, he had another addition to his growing family, sixth child, Kulwant Singh, who grew to be a Professor at Panjab

University, Chandigarh and my saviour to support my stay with him during four years of my graduation at Panjab University thus becoming an architect of my career for which I always have remained obliged to him!

Back in academics he formed a *satsang* group of knowledgeable and like-minded people to hold regular discussion sessions for in depth research of Gurbani and Vyakarana, and in about one year they were ready with first draft of the meanings of Guru Granth Sahib according to its grammar.

After about two years' stay at Gujranwala College in May 1927, he was offered a position at Khalsa College, Amritsar and it was decided that he would join after the summer vacations. Knowing this Khalsa College, Gujranwala relieved him. And, to his bad luck Khalsa College, Amritsar withdrew its offer even before he could join on an apprehension that the Punjab government's annual grant of Rs 50,000/- may get effected as J M Dunnet was now the Chief Secretary of Punjab Government, who earlier was the DC of Amritsar at the time of *Jaito da morcha* when Sahib Singh was at SGPC signing all its communications, sending a wrong impression in Dunnet's mind that Sahib Singh was the man behind all that SGPC was doing. This put Sahib Singh in a grave situation; he once again became unemployed for no fault on his part. He planned to start a monthly journal "Jeevan" but all that needed time and investment before you see revenue flowing in. In this time of distress, he rejoined SGPC but simultaneously kept pursuing with the senior management of the College. He writes about a meeting with the College Principal, Sardar Bishan Singh:

“ਉਹਨਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਕੁੱਝ ਗਿਲਾ ਸੀ ਕਿ ਮੈਂ ਫੇਰ ਉਹੀ ਕੰਮ ਕੀਤਾ ਜਿਸ ਤੋਂ ਪੰਜਾਬ ਸਰਕਾਰ ਅੱਗੇ ਹੀ ਮੇਰੇ ਨਾਲ ਨਰਾਜ਼ ਸੀ, ਮੈਂ ਫੇਰ ਸ਼੍ਰੋਮਣੀ ਕਮੇਟੀ ਦੀ ਮੁਲਾਜ਼ਮਤ ਵਿੱਚ ਹੀ ਚਲਾ ਗਿਆ।”

He responded:

“.....ਸਰਦਾਰ ਜੀ, ਮੈਨੂੰ ਪੜਨ ਦਾ ਸ਼ੌਕ ਸੀ। ਤਾਹੀਏਂ ਮੈਂ ੨੫੦ ਰੁਪਏ ਮਹੀਨਾ ਤਨਖਾਹ ਛੱਡ ਕੇ ੧੫੦ ਰੁਪਏ ਮਹੀਨਾ ਉਤੇ ਗੁੱਜਰਾਂਵਾਲੇ ਕਾਲਜ ਵਿਚ ਚਲਾ ਗਿਆ ਸਾਂ। ਤੁਸੀਂ ਮੈਨੂੰ ਅਪਣੇ ਕਾਲਜ ਵਿਚ ਰੱਖ ਲਿਆ। ਉਥੋਂ ਮੈਨੂੰ ਜਵਾਬ ਮਿਲ ਗਿਆ। ਤੁਸੀਂ ਭੀ ਜਵਾਬ ਦੇ ਦਿੱਤਾ; ਮੈਂ ਕਿਸੇ ਥਾਂ ਜੋਗਾ ਨ ਰਿਹਾ। ਮੈਂ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਦਰਬਾਰ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਕਮੇਟੀ ਦਾ ਬੜਾ ਹੀ ਧੰਨਵਾਦੀ ਹਾਂ ਕਿ ਉਹਨਾਂ ਮੈਨੂੰ ਰੁਲਦੇ ਨੂੰ ਗੱਲ ਲਾਇਆ। ਦੱਸੋ ਇਸ ਬੇ-ਰੁਜ਼ਗਾਰੀ ਦੀ ਹਾਲਤ ਵਿੱਚ ਹੋਰ ਮੈਂ ਕਰਦਾ ਭੀ ਕੀ?”

Ultimately, he got the offer, and joined Khalsa College, Amritsar, on November 4, 1929, after about five months' stressful period of unemployment and uncertainty, at a monthly salary of Rs 120 – once again less than his last salary. This was the price he kept paying for his love for academics and Gurbani. And the powers to be kept on exploiting him – not being able to see the shining star within him!

On the Gurpurab day on November 24, as Prof Jodh Singh was not well. He was asked to perform *katha*. The Gurdwara hall was all jam-packed with the College professors and students; the President and the Principal also being present there. Everyone was spell bound during the *katha* and henceforth this responsibility was assigned to him!

He was allotted a house on the College campus for which he was required to pay a monthly rent of Rs 12. He requested for a rent-free accommodation as his salary fixed already was lower than what he was getting in his previous job and this amount made much difference to him. To this the Principal remarked:

“ਸਾਹਿਬ ਸਿੰਘ ਹਰ ਰੋਜ਼ ਗੁਰਦਵਾਰੇ ਵਿੱਚ ਕਥਾ ਕਰੇ, ਕਿਰਾਇਆ ਨਹੀਂ ਲਿਆ ਜਾਏਗਾ।”

And Sahib Singh replied:

“ਸਰਦਾਰ ਜੀ! ਜੇ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਸਿੰਘ ੧੨੦ ਰੁਪਏ ਵਿੱਚ ਗੁਜ਼ਾਰਾ ਕਰੇਗਾ, ਤਾਂ ੧੨ ਰੁਪਏ ਘੱਟ ਵਿੱਚ ਵੀ ਦਿਨ ਗੁਜ਼ਾਰ ਲਏਗਾ, ਪਰ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਸਿੰਘ ਕਥਾ ਨੂੰ ਇਸ ਤਰਾਂ ਵੇਚਣ ਨੂੰ ਤਿਆਰ ਨਹੀਂ ਹੈ।”

Principal's reply came:

“ਸਾਹਿਬ ਸਿੰਘ ਨੂੰ ਕਹਿ ਦਿਉ, ਉਸ ਪਾਸੋਂ ਕੋਈ ਕਿਰਾਇਆ ਨਹੀਂ ਲਿਆ ਜਾਵੇਗਾ। ਕਥਾ ਉਹ ਕਰੇ ਜਾਂ ਨ ਕਰੇ, ਉਸ ਦੀ ਮਰਜ਼ੀ।”

That was the character – Prof Sahib Singh – outspoken, apparently blunt but truthful words!

His creative work on Gurbani was now getting set on a launching pad. The first Teeka published was “*Bhattan de Smayee*” (ਭੱਟਾਂ ਦੇ ਸਵਈਏ) in 1930 for which he received a financial support of rupees 250 from SGPC, with the inspiration of the then Jathedar of Sri Akal Takht Sahib, Sardar Teja Singh ji Akarpuri, in return of its 200 copies. A year later in 1931 he published *Jup ji Sahib Steek* (ਜਪ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਸਟੀਕ) using the *Gurbani Vyakaran* he had already prepared but was not yet published. A “*Pryaey*” (ਪ੍ਰਯਾਯ) of “*Nanak Parkash*” composed by *Kavi*

Santokh Singh was written by Prof Sahib Singh in 1922 but published in 1931. A copy of this, in delicate condition was seen by the author in Dyal Singh Library, Lahore, during his second visit to Pakistan in May 2024, waiting for digitalisation. Another book “*Rabbi Bhatt*” published in 1935 is already digitalised.

In 1931, SGPC announced an award of rupees 1000 for best *Gurbani Vyakaran* which inspired him to focus his attention on its completion, finalising the manuscript in 1932 but could be published only in 1939; and the award presented to him at Sri Akal Takht Sahib on September 13, 1939. He fortunately survived repeated attempts of hijacking this manuscript by a close acquaintance against which he was cautioned by a well-wisher, Dr Runn Singh back in Gujranwala.

In between he faced two major tragedies – losing his younger brother, Dewan Singh, and his wife, Agya Kaur, in 1932 after accidentally slipping over banana peel. With six children – eldest being in college and the youngest only six years old – daily routine became a nightmare for the family. On the advice of well-wishers, he agreed for second marriage with Rattan Kaur, a childless widow, on December 31, 1933. He had two children from this wedlock – Daljit Singh on October 11, 1934, and Bhupinder Kaur on September 5, 1939; both studied medicine and were well known in their own fields.

Dr Daljit Singh was an internationally acclaimed ophthalmologist well known for his inventions related to intraocular cataract surgery; was a *Padma Shri recipient*, *Nishan-e-khalsa* awardee and personal physician of the then President of India, Giani Zail Singh.

A very interesting incident is worth describing here which relates to his participation in the Sikh Educational Conference held at Khalsa College, Gujranwala in 1935. He was invited to contribute an article for presentation in the conference in about half an hour. During the presentation, he had hardly spoken for five minutes when the stage secretary sent a message of his time being over. He immediately announced, “Khalsa ji, my time is over” and stopped. In these five minutes he had infused such an interest in the audience that they all started protesting and pressing him to continue. The perplexed management reconsidered and the then Conference President, Sardar Sunder Singh ji Majithia announced,

“ਸਾਹਿਬ ਸਿੰਘ! ਅਪਣਾ ਲੈਕਚਰ ਸ਼ੁਰੂ ਕਰ ਦੇਹ। ਜਿਤਨਾ ਚਿਰ ਤੂੰ ਬੋਲ ਸਕੇਂ, ਬੋਸਕ ਬੋਲ।”

He resumed and spoke for full one and half hour on *Gurbani Vyakaran!* That was Prof Sahib Singh – confident with thorough grasp of his subject!

During class interactions with B.A. students, he was inspired to research and write all Sikh Gurus' life histories using analytical and critical evaluation of all relevant aspects like he did while decoding the *Gurbani Vyakaran*. He writes about this:

“ਕੁੱਝੋ ਨੂੰ ਲੱਤ ਬੜੀ ਹੀ ਕਾਰੀ ਆਈ। ਕਾਲਜ ਵਿੱਚ ਪੜ੍ਹਾਉਦਿਆਂ ਵਿਦਿਆਰਥੀਆਂ ਦੇ ਪ੍ਰਸ਼ਨਾਂ ਨੇ ਮੈਨੂੰ ਅੰਨ੍ਹੇ ਨੂੰ ਅੱਖਾਂ ਦੇ ਦਿੱਤੀਆਂ।”

Based in Amritsar, it became his permanent abode where he could pursue his academic interests with greater concentration and got more of his writings published between 1940 and 1947:

1. Jaap Sahib Steek (ਜਾਪ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਸਟੀਕ)
2. Farid Slok Steek (ਫਰੀਦ ਸਲੋਕ ਸਟੀਕ)
3. Guru Angad Sahib Shlok Steek (ਗੁਰੂ ਅੰਗਦ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਸਲੋਕ ਸਟੀਕ)
4. Das Vaarran Steek (ਦਸ ਵਾਰਾਂ ਸਟੀਕ)
5. Sidh Goshti Steek (ਸਿੱਧ ਗੋਸ਼ਟੀ ਸਟੀਕ)
6. Sate Balwand Vaar Steek (ਸੱਤੋ ਬਲਵੰਡ ਵਾਰ ਸਟੀਕ)
7. Jaitsari Vaar Steek (ਜੈਤਸਰੀ ਵਾਰ ਸਟੀਕ)

Later added to the above list were *Omkar Bani*, *Slok Bhagat Kabir ji*, *Bhagat Bani*, followed by several essays and articles on Sikhism, Sikh history, Sikh philosophy, etc, for newspapers and radio talk shows which were compiled and published as books – *Sarbat da Bhala*, *Dharam ate Sadachar*, *Simran dian Barktan*, *Ad Bir Bare*, *Burai da Takera*, *Sikh Sidak na Hare*, etc.

At Khalsa College he had the privilege to have worked in the company of great scholars of that time like Bhai Jodh Singh, Prof Teja Singh, Dr Ganda Singh, Prof Sant Singh Sekhon, Prof Wariam Singh and Prof Mohan Singh. He retired from Khalsa College on October 12, 1952. Sikh Missionary College, which had been unfunctional for the past some years was reactivated, and he was appointed as its principal. During this tenure, on the inspiration of one of his well-wishers, Sardar Dalip Singh from Delhi, he initiated

the massive task of writing full *Teeka* of Sri Guru Granth Sahib on January 1, 1957, completing it in June 1961. Its publication was the next arduous task before him for which he approached SGPC and its *Dharam Parchar* Committee under the Chairmanship of Master Tara Singh declined his request leaving him greatly disappointed. He writes:

“.....ਮੈਨੂੰ ਰੰਜ ਬੜਾ ਹੋਇਆ। ਮੈਨੂੰ ਸ਼ੱਕ ਇਹ ਸੀ ਕਿ ਕਿਸੇ ਸੱਜਣ ਦੀ ਈਰਖਾ ਨੇ ਭਾਨੀ ਮਾਰੀ ਹੈ, ਪਰ ਸਭ ਕੁਝ ਮਾਲਕ ਦੇ ਹੁਕਮ ਵਿੱਚ ਹੀ ਹੁੰਦਾ ਹੈ।”

Shri Sohan Lal ji Khanna of Raj Publishers, Jalandhar, agreed to undertake this publication work which was titled “Guru Granth Sahib Darpan” published in ten volumes and successfully completed on November 20, 1964. Having completed this he started writing Sikh Gurus’ life histories and completed in 1967 which were all published by Singh Brothers.

Singh Sabha of Bangkok honoured him for his achievements in 1965. Punjabi University, Patiala honoured him in 1971 with D.Litt. Honorary degree, recognising his lifelong work with complete dedication producing *Gurbani Vyakaran*, *Guru Granth sahib Darpan* and several other books on Sikhism.

After his retirement he was living with his youngest son, Dr Daljit Singh, who has two sons – Ravijit Singh and Kiranjit Singh (both eye doctors). Most people visiting him knew them as the only two grandsons. An interesting revelation about it came to me on November 21, 1997 after I was introduced by Prof Deepak Manmohan Singh to the members of Syndicate of Panjab University, Chandigarh, during the dinner after having joined as its Registrar. Dr Kashmir Singh Gill, the then DPI Colleges Punjab, who also was present there, conveyed it to the then SGPC President, S. Gurcharan Singh ji Tohra, who immediately expressed his astonishment to ask from where this grandson has appeared because Prof Sahib Singh has only two grandsons. The feedback came to me very early next morning and I informed Dr Gill about more than two dozen of his grandchildren, half of them living in Chandigarh and Mohali. And all of them are well educated and well settled in diverse professions – teachers, professors, bankers, engineers, doctors, industrialists, army officers, administrators, etc. It was all due to his hard work with dedication and commitment; his prayers and blessings that all his children and

grandchildren could get good education and reach respectable heights in diverse professions. We all bow our heads in his fond memory and pay our homage to the great noble soul of Prof Sahib Singh for his continued blessings on us all.

He was an exceptionally simple person with focussed thoughts and objectives for which he strived all his life with full dedication and disciplined time management without any greed of money or fame. Once he received an offer from the Language Department of Punjab Government to write Punjabi grammar books for the schools which would have brought him a remuneration of around rupees 20,000 but he flatly declined saying that every moment of his time was for the **Guru**, and he would not use it for any other purpose even though it was a big amount back in the sixties.

Wedding ceremonies of all his children were so simple that even the neighbours never knew of it until after the ceremony. Three of the brothers married three real sisters from Jammu and the fourth one from the same street was married to my father. He himself did not attend most of them. But I and my wife are very fortunate that he came along with my grandmother, Rattan Kaur, to bless us on our wedding on January 24, 1971.

Although he spent most of his lifetime studying Gurbani but because of his own frequent illnesses and then with family issues he had also taken keen interest in yoga, studying homeopathy and, particularly, the biochemic system of medicines. He often tried it on him and his family successfully. Regular communication with the family was another intrinsic quality; writing a weakly post card with prayers, blessings and biochemic medicinal recommendations, whenever required, were their main features. He had also mastered some *mantras* for treating snake and scorpion bites.

Many people have an impression of a rude person about him, but this was an intentional external shell he had put around himself to avoid any time wastage in useless gossips. Anyone wanting to discuss Gurbani was always welcome. In fact, he was a very disciplined, determined, kind-hearted, God fearing, helpful scholarly person who spent all his life struggling against poverty but kept moving ahead with focussed approach to pursue his aim of life to understand Gurbani

and put forth his creations to hundreds and thousands of his readers to facilitate their understanding of Gurbani, who all admire him with utmost respects.

The last five years of his life also were very difficult, fighting with Parkinson's disease to which he succumbed on October 29, 1977. He lived a very meaningful life, though under extreme struggling periods, with aims and objectives well set early in life and achieving the same in his lifetime with full dedication, determination, discipline, faith in Him and never bothering what people would say! He is a shining star of Sikh Faith who will, by way of his creations, keep guiding us all and the entire humanity like a light house to follow the Sikh philosophy for *Sarbat ka Bhalla*.

I have been very fortunate to get an opportunity to visit and feel the sacred soil of village Fattewali, where Prof Sahib Singh was born as Nathu Ram, getting a clue from a video on U Tube posted by Muhammad Naeem Malik, an admirer of Prof Sahib Singh, and resident of a neighbouring village, *Bhure Ki*. This clue together with kind gesture of journalist Lovely Singh from Lahore together with efforts of Jagdeep Singh Sandhu made this visit possible. Love and affection of the Bhinder family now occupying the house was heart warming and so was it from the residents of the village making me nostalgic. The video covering this visit is also on the U tube,

#### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:**

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# COLONIAL PUNJAB, CHRISTIAN MISSIONS, AND THE MAKING OF SIKH COUNTER-DISOURSE

DR JASWINDER SINGH\*

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## INTRODUCTION

In the mid-nineteenth century onwards, Amritsar, the hometown of Bhai Vir Singh (1881-1975), became a major centre for Christian activities, including the establishment of churches, schools, and societies such as the Zenana Mission. Bhai Vir Singh himself attended one such school, where the headmaster, a padre (pastor), was very fond of the young Vir Singh and even encouraged him to join his mission. Bhai Vir Singh was a devout Sikh who had inherited Sikh values from his early childhood through his maternal grandfather, with whom he spent most of his formative years. He was well-versed in Gurbani and Sikh principles, having read and contemplated the *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* from a very young age. Bhai Vir Singh was deeply concerned about the threat that missionary activities, supported by the colonial regime, posed to the indigenous religious communities in Punjab, especially the Sikh Panth. The main reason for establishing his own press was to raise awareness and help Sikhs understand the nature and methods of Christian missionary activities that could harm their community. Losing Sikhs to another faith was unacceptable to Bhai Vir Singh. This paper aims to introduce Bhai Vir Singh's selected tract focusing on Christian conversion activities, their methods, and misinterpretations of Gurbani, along with a critique to alert the people of colonial Punjab.

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### **CHRISTIANITY AND CONVERSION IN PUNJAB**

Christianity initially arrived in Punjab with the conversion of the Parthian King Gondophernes by St. Thomas in the first century A. D. However, it disappeared when the Kushans overthrew Parthian power. A more significant and lasting effort to spread Christianity in Punjab began when Rev. John C. Lowrie, an American Protestant missionary of the Presbyterian Church, arrived in Ludhiana in November 1834. From 1849 onwards, Christian missionary centres were established in almost all major towns in Punjab, systematically gaining converts to Christianity. By the 1860s, the United Presbyterian Mission had been founded in Sialkot. The Reformed Presbyterian Mission was established in Patiala. The Church of Scotland began operations in 1856, and the Methodists arrived in Lahore in 1880. By 1870, the Presbyterian Mission had expanded its network with stations in Lahore, Jalandhar, Rawalpindi, Ambala, and Sabathu, along with substations at Ambala Cantonment, Rajpura, Jagraon, Shahabad, and Hoshiarpur. By the turn of the nineteenth century, Christian missions of various denominations had established themselves in most major towns and villages of Punjab. When the British Empire had established itself, Christian missionaries were very active in terms of conversion efforts in Punjab. They pursued a worldwide agenda of conversion, leading to numerous practices and approaches aimed at establishing Christianity as the dominant religion in the region. A Baptist mission was established at Kharar. On September 1, 1886, the Lahore Diocese was founded, marking the start of the Roman Catholic mission's activities in Punjab. Many scholars have studied the various perspectives on Christianity in Punjab. A large set of works deals with Christianity in Punjab, for example, Singh (1967), Singh (1987), Singh (1988), Grewal (1990), Bhatti (1995), Arshi (2004), Webster (2012), and Singh (2018), together providing detailed accounts of Christian theology, biblical history, missionary linguistic and literary contributions, and the development of Christian sects. They offer historical analyses of Punjabi Christian identity and missionary impact, emphasizing how caste and colonial politics shaped community formation.

### **BHAI VIR SINGH AND *KHALSA TRACT SOCIETY***

The establishment of the Singh Sabha movement in 1873 primarily

responded to the issue of Christian conversion, when four Sikh students at the Mission School in Amritsar declared their religion to be Christianity. During the colonial period, while Christians engaged in conversion efforts, Bhai Vir Singh emerged as a prominent figure who not only wrote about this issue but also played a key role in affirming native society and its values. He founded various institutions to inspire Punjab's youth to contribute to their community from multiple perspectives. As a thinker, he systematically challenged Western frameworks of life and institutions. In this analysis, we will examine some of his writings that thoroughly address the issue of Christian conversion in Punjab, discussing how missionaries mislead, fabricate, and misinterpret the *Guru Granth Sahib*. Finally, he questions who is truthful and urges Christians to examine whether there is any truth in their hearts regarding conversion. Our goal is to understand how Bhai Vir Singh raises questions, analyzes the situation, and offers insights to grasp the reality. Bhai Vir Singh is best known for his contributions to literature and religion, especially for reviving the Sikh spirit during times of decline or serious challenges posed by colonial knowledge, practices, and policies that disrupted Punjab's social fabric. However, he was not oblivious to the social changes around him, particularly colonial interventions and their missionary activities. He responded with firm resolve, dedicating himself to awakening and uplifting his community. As a young, intelligent boy who had recently graduated from school, he already exhibited traits of a contemplative individual, deeply aware of the challenges facing his community. From an early age, he internalized Sikh values and developed a deep love for living a life, i.e., *Jeevan Jach*, in accordance with the ideals of a true Gursikh. On one occasion, Bhai Vir Singh met a pastor who asked for his thoughts on their newly built church. He observed that it seemed small. In response, the pastor remarked that a larger one had already been built, sarcastically referencing the Sri Harmandir Sahib (Giani, 2009). This encounter deeply influenced Bhai Vir Singh, strengthening his resolve to dedicate his life to serving the Sikh community. He decided to work toward awakening his fellow Sikhs to the greatness of their faith. Motivated by this mission, he established the *Wazir Hind Press* with a friend of his maternal uncle. To further channel his missionary

zeal, he founded the *Khalsa Tract Society* in 1894, aiming to publish and freely distribute tracts on issues concerning the Sikh community; the first tract was circulated in 1894. Additionally, in 1899, he launched *Khalsa Samachar*, the weekly newspaper of the Sikhs, providing a regular platform to promote Sikh values, history, and identity.

### REVISITING BHAI VIR SINGH'S TRACTS

Bhai Vir Singh published a series of tracts covering various topics such as the lives of Gurus and the Sikhs, Gurbani interpretation, Christian conversion, science fiction, children's literature, women's upliftment, spiritual and social crises, and more. Regarding Christian missionaries converting people in Punjab, Bhai Vir Singh published five tracts to explore the issue and raise awareness among the people, which aimed both to inform Punjabis and to respond to Christian missionaries who were fabricating and misinterpreting *Guru Granth Sahib*. Here, we will see how Bhai Vir Singh raises questions, identifies problems methodologically, and presents the factual situation in his tracts.

#### 1. *Je Eho Haal Riha Ta Asi Dubbe*

In August 1902, *KTS* published Bhai Vir Singh's tract, *Je Eho Haal Riha Ta Asi Dubbe* (If this situation persists, we are doomed) (Singh 1902), which describes the situation of Christian conversion in Punjab through a dialogue between two women named Ram Kaur and Bhagan. Ram Kaur asks Bhagan about her visit to Mussoorie. Bhagan's husband, Hattu, has converted to Christianity and has been hired to distribute medicines for seven rupees. Because of him, she is also converted, but she is confused after hearing the Christian missionary's words about being born again. Through their dialogue, Bhai Vir Singh explains how the Christian missionaries are helping with medicine and daily needs. They are converting the lowest stratum of society and telling them that after conversion, they are casteless. So, people like *Chooobra* feel that they are no longer regarded as garbage, even though they share a society with English people. Bhai Vir Singh describes how the people of Ram Kaur's religion are uninterested in the low-caste individuals because they need workers for their daily routines and services. Bhagan warns Ram Kaur that we will achieve a higher status in society and

that our work will now be done by Brahmins. She mentioned that her Madam (White Lady) said that one day the whole world will be Christian. Analysing this, Bhai Vir Singh tells the readers how our people are reluctant in their luxurious and day-to-day lives. We have abandoned the tradition, and the Sadhus have neglected their duties. We have also withdrawn our support and honour from the weaker members of our society who are leaving us due to our actions. Therefore, we should again follow the tradition of the Sikh Gurus and preach the real *Dharm*.

## **2.Sadi Draoni Dasha**

The title of the tracts itself shows the immediacy of his concern and how compelled and keen he was to revert it. In the tract titled *Sadi Draoni Dasha* (Our Horrible Situation)(Singh n.d.), a mere mention of a line by a Bengali writer in his essay about Sikhs that ‘now the Sikhs are going to be lost soon’(*bun Sikh turant furant gum bunde jaindebunn*) was an alarm bell for him. He wrote about the Bengali writer’s observations in this tract, with the line above mentioned as its subtitle. Mere reading of this title would draw readers’ attention to the rapidly deteriorating condition of Sikhs under colonial rule. He was so distressed and troubled by the thought that if such a day would dawn, when the Sikh community would no longer exist. He reminisces that what a great and brave community had been the Sikh community, having said that, he analyses the historical trajectory of upheavals within the Sikh community and how it had suffered losses in the past when after the end of rule Maharaja Ranjit Singh many Sikhs got back to their original faiths cutting their *kes* (hair) but the revolt of 1857 proved that it can only be the Sikh Panth that has the capacity to challenge and overthrow the British rule. The efforts of the Singh Sabha movements, the publication of magazines, journals, and newspapers, and the moral teachings of learned men had helped to revive the Sikh panth. The teachings of Guru Nanak had universal appeal, and no one within Hinduistan has remained untouched by this divine light. He questions that if such was the appeal of his message, for a common one can well imagine the impact it had on Sikhs. The people of the Sikh faith are among the finest human beings: brave, kindhearted, truthful, and it is because of these qualities that people

of other faiths are jealous of them and are in an endeavour to assimilate them into their own faith. The situation is now more alarming as the missionaries have reached the villages of Punjab, where they are holding meetings to attract people to their fold. But he sees a ray of hope that in those Sikh brothers who can work to curb their impact, he gives a clarion call to the Sikh Brotherhood that all is not lost if they could take out a little time and money, as per the Sikh norm of *daswandh*, this can go a long way in controlling the further spread of Christianity. Sikhs must remember the great legacy of the Gurus to which they are inheritors, save the panth from this threat, and work towards the progress and advancement of the community.

### **3. *Dhokhe to Bacho***

Bhai Vir Singh kept a close watch on the forms and patterns the missionaries used to spread the gospel. In the tract *Dhokhe to Bacho* (Beware of Deceit) (Singh n.d.), he is of the opinion that, unlike the methods used by politicians or worldly wise men for getting their work done, i.e., deceit within the religious sphere, the truth is given the supreme status, so whatever is truthful shall prevail. The people of a third religion that has now come to Punjab had been recognised by common people as “karani”, and amongst the educated they are known as “isai”. The tract lists the methods that missionaries employ, such as opening schools, giving scholarships, distributing gifts and medicines, and providing skill training. With the help of these tools, they have been persuading people to join their fold. The success achieved with these methods has been very limited, but they are now resorting to new ones. Finding Sikhs’ strong faith in Guru Nanak, they are trying to convince people that Guru Nanak was actually a Christian, which hasn’t yielded much result. Now, they have resorted to another method, i.e. of taking up a few verses from the GGS and misinterpreting the lines and printing them in the form of leaflets with the title “verses from the Granth (*grantha de vak*)” and presented in rhymed forms that mimicked Sikh scriptural style while subtly promoting Christian theological ideas, particularly the doctrine of the Trinity. He elaborates with an example in which the style sounds as if these verses were mentioned in the *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*. He reveals the deceit in the interpretation of these verses, as they were given a Christian

interpretation of the doctrine of the Trinity, i.e., Father, Son, and holy Spirit, equated with *pita* (father) and *putar* (son); for example:

ਪਿਤਾ ਹਮਾਰੇ ਪ੍ਰਗਟੇ ਮਾਝ  
ਪਿਤਾ ਪੁਤ੍ਰ ਰਲ ਕੀਨੀ ਸਾਝ  
ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਜਬ ਪਿਤਾ ਪਤੀਨੇ  
ਪਿਤਾ ਪੁਤ ਏਕੈ ਰੰਗ ਲੀਨੇ।

Bhai Vir Singh urges readers to stay away from such deceitful leaflets that are distributed, and even suggests that Christian missionaries should hesitate to engage in such acts. He finds such acts unholy and not appropriate for a person who calls himself religious.

#### **4. Anarth**

Another analysis of a leaflet is presented in the tract titled *Anarth* (Misinterpretation) (Singh n.d.), which explains how a grave misinterpretation of a verse from *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* can lead to a serious misunderstanding and meaninglessness. Bhai Vir Singh explains the verse word by word, highlighting the writer's complete ignorance of the Hindi and Urdu languages. The way meanings are extracted from the words shows a compelling way in which the interpreter links verses to Christian theology and aspects of Jesus' life. Sikh theology certainly has a different perspective on attaining salvation. The spiritual path laid down in Sikhism focuses on *naam simran*, love in one's soul and constant remembrance of *Wahguru*.

#### **5. Sacha Guru**

This leaflet, *Sacha Guru* (The True Guru) (Singh 1903), is again about defining the real or true Guru, which, according to missionaries, is Jesus Christ, not Guru Nanak, for which they are, in fact, finding evidence in the SGGS. Bhai Vir Singh says that Jesus himself never considered himself the guru or god; he was the son of a human, not God. The quote is a verse from the Varan of Bhai Gurudas, where it is explicitly said that many gurus will come and go, they may even call themselves Isa. Bhai Vir Singh believes that the Christian missionaries are totally unaware of Sikh religious traditions. In Sikh tradition, there are three forms of religious sermons: excellent, medium, and low. The excellent sermon is one in which the preacher considers himself a sinner first, and hence preaches the lesson to himself before others. In

the medium form, the preacher considers all as sinners; in the lowest form, the preacher considers others as sinners. Bhai Vir Singh says that Guru Nanak was an excellent preacher, though this does not mean he was a sinner; it reflects his deep humility and sense of connectedness with all souls, human.

### CLOSING

Thus, in these tracts, Bhai Vir Singh describes how Christian missionaries operate on the ground. He explains that they invested 5 to 5 lakhs to convert two high-profile individuals and then converted lower-status people. In Punjab, they understand that to elevate the name of Christ, they must critique Guru Nanak. Therefore, they misinterpret Gurbani and mislead innocent people. They are printing pamphlets to deceive the public, as Bhai Vir Singh notes in a tract that they have misinterpreted Gurbani. Through the Gurbani idiom, they preach that God is the Father and Christ is his son. Bhai Vir Singh also tells Christian missionaries to be ashamed. For their own benefit, they are sidelining the truth. Are they truly working for *Dharam*? What will God bless them as *Dharmi* for their actions, and is this the purity of heart described in your scriptures? Instead of following the path of truth, are they deceiving people for personal gain?

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**JAAP SAHIB**  
**TRANSLATION AND INTERPRETATION (PAURIS 20 TO 28)**

**PROF KULWANT SINGH\***

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The poetic composition Jaap Sahib by Sri Guru Gobind Singh is powerful invocatory prayer to the Divine Cosmic power seeking its blessings. Since its true identity is inscrutable and its magnitude is unfathomable, Guru Gobind Singh seeks its blessings by referring to its multiple, often antithetical, Divine attributes and saluting to and bowing before it for its multiple roles and forms.

In this set of Pauri/ Stanzas (20-28) given below written in Bhujang Paryat Chhand, the Guru seeks Divine power's blessings by referring to His being a creator and destroyer, closely involved and detached, a scorcher like the sun and soothing like the moon, benevolent and aloof simultaneously and being immortal, all pervasive, wondrous and worthy of worship.

These verses being published in continuation of the earlier nineteen verses of this longer 199 Pauri/ Stanza verse in serial form in quarterly issues of Abstracts of Sikh Studies are meant to highlight all the Divine attributes of the Supreme Divine power. Being recitative, repetitive and rhythmic, these verses are likely to create an aura and environment of spiritual ecstasy when recited in the original Gurmukhi script of Punjabi language. Its English translation, although not as fluent and rhythmic as the original verse, nevertheless makes an earnest attempt to enable the reader to grasp the content of this verse and experience its spiritual ecstasy.

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ਨਮੋ ਸਰਬ ਖਾਪੇ ॥ ਨਮੋ ਸਰਬ ਥਾਪੇ ॥  
 ਨਮੋ ਸਰਬ ਕਾਲੇ ॥ ਨਮੋ ਸਰਬ ਪਾਲੇ ॥੨੦॥  
 namo sarb khapai, namo sarb thapai  
 namo sarb kalai, namo sarb palai. ||20||

ਨਮਸਤਸਤੁ ਦੇਵੇ ॥ ਨਮਸਤੰ ਅਭੇਵੇ ॥  
 ਨਮਸਤੰ ਅਜਨਮੇ ॥ ਨਮਸਤੰ ਸੁਬਨਮੇ ॥੨੧॥  
 namsatsut devai, namustun abhaivai  
 namustun ajanmai, namustun sobanmai. ||21||

ਨਮੋ ਸਰਬ ਗਉਨੇ ॥ ਨਮੋ ਸਰਬ ਭਉਨੇ ॥  
 ਨਮੋ ਸਰਬ ਰੰਗੇ ॥ ਨਮੋ ਸਰਬ ਭੰਗੇ ॥੨੨॥  
 namo sarb gounai, namo sarb bhounai  
 namo sarb rungai, namo sarb bhungai. ||22||

ਨਮੋ ਕਾਲ ਕਾਲੇ ॥ ਨਮਸਤਸਤੁ ਦਿਆਲੇ ॥  
 ਨਮਸਤੰ ਅਬਰਨੇ ॥ ਨਮਸਤੰ ਅਮਰਨੇ ॥੨੩॥  
 namo kal kalai, namustst dayalai  
 namustun abarnai, namustun amarnai. ||23||

ਨਮਸਤੰ ਜਰਾਰੰ ॥ ਨਮਸਤੰ ਕ੍ਰਿਤਾਰੰ ॥  
 ਨਮੋ ਸਰਬ ਧੰਧੇ ॥ ਨਮੋ ਸਤ ਅਬੰਧੇ ॥੨੪॥  
 namustun jararung, namustun kirtarung  
 unnamo sarb dhundhai, namo sutt abundhai. ||24||

ਨਮਸਤੰ ਨ੍ਰਿਸਾਕੇ ॥ ਨਮਸਤੰ ਨ੍ਰਿਬਾਕੇ ॥  
 ਨਮਸਤੰ ਰਹੀਮੇ ॥ ਨਮਸਤੰ ਕਰੀਮੇ ॥੨੫॥  
 namustung nirsakai, namustun nirbakai  
 namustung rahimai, namustun karimai. ||25||

ਨਮਸਤੰ ਅਨੰਤੋ ॥ ਨਮਸਤੰ ਮਹੰਤੋ ॥  
 ਨਮਸਤਸਤੁ ਰਾਗੇ ॥ ਨਮਸਤੰ ਸੁਹਾਗੇ ॥੨੬॥  
 namustung anuntai, namustun mahuntai  
 namustst ragai, namustung sohagai ||26||

Salutation to the Divine Lord;  
 Who, being universal destroyer is a universal creator.  
 Salutation to the Divine Lord;  
 Who, being universal annihilator is a universal preserver. || 20 ||

Salutation to the Divine Lord;  
 Who, being beyond comprehension, is worthy of worship;  
 Salutation to the Divine Lord;  
 Who, being beyond being born, is uniquely wonderful. || 21 ||

Salutation to the Divine Lord;  
 Who, having access all round, is all pervasive;  
 Salutation to the Divine Lord;  
 Who, being pervasive in all colours, is also destroyer of all. || 22 ||

Salutation to the Divine Lord;  
 Whose writ runs over death is universally benevolent.  
 Salutation to the Divine Lord;  
 Who, being immortal, is without any caste identity. || 23 ||

Salutation to the Divine Lord;  
 Who, being universal creator, is beyond aging;  
 Salutation to the Divine Lord;  
 Who is semeltaneously involved as well as detached. || 24 ||

Salutation to the Divine Lord;  
 Who has neither any family relations nor any apprehensions.  
 Salutation to the Divine Lord;  
 Who is both compassionate as well as generous. || 25 ||

Salutation to the Divine Lord;  
 Who, being infinite, is worthy of greatest worship.  
 Salutation to the Divine Lord;  
 Whose reflection is both melodious and harmonious. || 26 ||

ਨਮੋ ਸਰਬ ਸੋਖੰ ॥ ਨਮੋ ਸਰਬ ਪੋਖੰ ॥  
ਨਮੋ ਸਰਬ ਕਰਤਾ ॥ ਨਮੋ ਸਰਬ ਹਰਤਾ ॥੨੭॥  
namo sarb sokhung, namo sarb pokh  
unnamo sarb karta, namo sarb harta. ||27||

ਨਮੋ ਜੋਗ ਜੋਗੇ ॥ ਨਮੋ ਭੋਗ ਭੋਗੇ ॥  
ਨਮੋ ਸਰਬ ਦਿਆਲੇ ॥ ਨਮੋ ਸਰਬ ਪਾਲੇ ॥੨੮॥  
namo jog jogai, namo bhog bhogai  
namo sarb dayalai, namo sarb palai. ||28||

Salutation to the Divine Lord;  
Who is sunlike scorcher and moon like soothingly cool.  
Salutation to the Divine Lord;  
Who is destroyer and preserver of whole creation. ||27||

Salutation to the Divine Lord;  
Who is the greatest ascetic as well as a hedonist.  
Salutation to the Divine Lord;  
Who is universally compassionate as well as sustainer. ||28||

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## BIBI BHANI: A HISTORIOGRAPHICAL STUDY OF HER LIFE AND CONTRIBUTION TO SIKH TRADITION

DR PARNEET KAUR\*

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*Bibi Bhani* was born from Mata Mansa Devi on *Jeth* 4, *Sammāt* 1590 *bikrami*, in the house of Guru Amardas.[1] According to Kahan Singh Nabha, *Bibi Bhani* was born on *Magh* 21, *Sammāt* 1591, in Basarke, district Amritsar.[2] Sohan Singh Seetal writes that *Bibi Bhani* was born on *Magh* 21, 1591, in *Bikrami Sammat* at village Basarke.[3] Based on the information, it can be said that *Bibi Bhani* was born in Basarke (Amritsar) on *Sammāt* in 1591 *bikrami*. She was the daughter of Guru Amardas and Mata Mansa Devi. *Giani* Gian Singh, Kahan Singh Nabha, Sohan Singh Seetal, and Rattan Singh Jaggi all mention that *Bibi Bhani* was born at Basarke, and the date of birth of *Bibi Bhani*, 21 *Magh*, 1591 *Bikrami* (2 February, 1534 AD) seems more appropriate.

*Bibi Bhani* also had siblings about whom different writers have different views. *Giani* Gian Singh in *Twarikh Guru Khalsa* writes that in 5 *Faghun*, 1595, *Bikrami Sammat* Baba Mohan was born, in 5 *Sawan*, 1598, *Bikrami Sammat* Baba Mohri was born, and in 7 *Chet*, 1601, *Bikrami Sammat* *Bibi* Nidhani (Dani) was born.[4] Saroop Das Bhalla states in '*Mehma Prakash, Vol. I*' about the siblings of *Bibi Bhani* that she had two brothers, Mohan and Mohri and one sister, *Bibi Bhani*. [5] About the name of *Bibi Bhani*, Syed Muhammad Latif states in '*History of the Punjab*' that her name was Mohini. Because she was happy with her father's will, everyone started calling her *Bhani*. [6] In *Mahankosh*, the meaning of the name *Bhani* is '*Bhaii*' (attractive), 'and *Pasand ayi*' also means 'bhan' which means 'light up'. So that the meaning of the *Bhani*

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word is liked by everyone, light up.[7]

According to Giani Gian Singh, Bibi Bhani was married to Ramdas on Phagun 16, Sammat 1599 *bikrami*. Sohan Singh Seetal states about the marriage of Bibi Bhani that when she was nineteen years old, on *Phagun 22, 1610 Bikrami*, she was married to Bhai Jetha.[8] According to Kahan Singh Nabha, Bibi Bhani got married in *Phagun 22, Sammat 1610*. [9] According to Harbans Singh, she was married on February 18, 1554 A.D., to Bhai Jetha.[10]

Various writers have different opinions about Bibi Bhani's wedding year. Giani Gian Singh says that the marriage took place in Sammat 1599 *bikrami* (1542 AD), according to this, she will be seven or eight years old during her marriage. Surjit Singh Gandhi writes that the view of Giani Gian Singh is unfounded for two reasons: firstly, the Guru Amar Das did not favour child marriage, and secondly, the sequence of the facts belies the assertion.

Bhai Jetha accompanied a band of devoted Sikhs who went to Goindwal to render service in the construction of Baoli. Since all records speak that the construction of Baoli was started in 1552 AD, the marriage took place after or in 1552 AD. Hence, it is reasonable to assign the end of 1552 AD or the beginning of 1553 AD as the year for the marriage of Bibi Bhani.[11] On the other side, Harbans Singh, Kahan Singh Nabha, Hari Ram Gupta, Rattan Singh Jaggi and Sohan Singh Seetal mention the year of marriage, Sammat 1610. According to this, Bibi Bhani must have been nineteen years old. So this year is considered right. In this way, Rattan Singh Jaggi and Himmat Singh Sodhi's views can be presented. They both write that Bibi Bhani and Guru Ram Das were both of the same age at their wedding.[12] According to the year of marriage, this age seems to be correct.

After marriage, Bibi Bhani and Bhai Jetha had the happiness of having three children in their married lives. Kesar Singh Chibbar[13] and Santokh Singh[58] mention three sons of Bibi Bhani with their names: Prithi Chand, Mahadev, and Arjan Dev. Kahan Singh Nabha also writes the dates: Prithi Chand (Sammat 1615), Mahadev (Sammat 1617), and Arjun Dev (Sammat 1620).[14] Saroop Das Bhalla in Mehma Prakash, Vol. I writes that Bibi Bhani was the mother of Guru Arjan Dev.[15] Vir Singh Bal in 'Gurkirat Parkash' also mentions about

three sons of Bibi Bhani: Prithi Chand, Mahadev, and Arjan Dev.[16] Here it becomes clear, on the basis of the information provided by Santokh Singh, and Vir Singh Bal's 'Gurkirat Parkash', that Bibi Bhani had three sons.

About the date of the death of Bibi Bhani, Rattan Singh Jaggi writes that Bibi Bhani died in 1655 bikrami at Goindwal. The fifth Guru, Guru Arjan Dev also installed a well in memory of Bibi Bhani, which is famous as Bibi Bhani's well.[17] Kesar Singh Chibbar[18] Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha writes in the same year that she died in 1655 at Goindwal.[19] Harbans Singh states that she died at Goindwal on April 9, 1598 A.D.[20]

### CONTRIBUTION OF BIBI BHANI

Although Bibi Bhani was the daughter of Guru Amar Das, wife of Guru Ram Das, mother of Guru Arjan Dev, and grandmother of Guru Hargobind, she had a unique personality. Who made an integral contribution to Sikhism through their deeds and service. Santokh Singh writes in his book 'Sri Gur Pratap Suraj Granth' She served her father as God. She was the embodiment of devotion herself. [21]

1. *Giani* Gian Singh states that *Bibi* Bhani and her husband, *Bhai* Jetha, considered Guru Amar Das as God and served him in such a way that no one else could be like them.[22] *Mehma Prakash* also writes that *Bibi* Bhani used to get up at the break of the day (sunrise).[23] Once Guru Amar Das was taking his bath, one of the legs of the stool was broken, on which he was seated. *Bibi* Bhani immediately put her foot under the stool, lest her father fall. Soon the Guru noticed some blood flowing along with water and came to know the alertness of his daughter to save him from falling. The Guru-father was touched by her service and wished for her to ask for any favour. She politely desired her father to make the *Gurgaddi* (the Nanak's throne) a hereditary succession. The Guru conceded to her wish but added that it would require a great sacrifice and involve displeasure, disputes and bitterness in the relationship.[24] According to Vir Singh Bal, Guru Amardas gave a boon to *Bibi* Bhani that the *gurgaddi* would remain in the Sodhi dynasty for seven generations.[25] Santokh Singh, under the title '*Gurgaddi Jaddi Karnā*', writes that when Guru Ramdas was blessed with *Gurgaddi*, *Bibi* Bhani requested that it should remain in her lineage

now. Guru *Pita* promised that the throne would remain at your house. But there will be a lot of hardships and obstacles; thus, Amardas blessed his daughter and made Ramdas guru and appeared him in the whole world. As to why *Bibi Bhani* made *Gurgaddi* hereditary, Santokh Singh explains that she already had an estimate for future conflicts and wars. Which was proved by the policies of Prithi Chand. Which work was difficult for men? *Bibi Bhani*, being a woman, did that work for the devotion of the Guru Amar Das.[26]

Santokh Singh in '*Suraj Prakash*', and *Bhai Vir Singh* write that this story of the boon is related to *Bibi Bhani*'s son, Guru Arjan Dev. *Bhai Vir Singh* states that when Guru Arjan Dev was in his childhood, one day he was crawling and reached near the *gaddi* of Guru Amar Das. The Guru smiled and said, "Son, the time has not come yet." Mother understood at that time that Arjun Dev had come from a spiritual place. Once upon a time in his childhood, Amar Das had said about Arjun Dev, "*Dohita Bani Da Bobita*." [27]

2. Khushwant Singh writes that Guru Amar Das made the *langar* an important institution of the Sikh religion by insisting that anyone who wanted to see the Guru had to first accept his hospitality by eating with the disciples. Among the people who visited him was Emperor Akbar, who was so impressed with the way of life at Goindwal that he assigned the revenues of several villages to the Guru's daughter, *Bibi Bhani*, as a marriage gift.[28] *Giani Gian Singh* in '*Panth Prakash*' and '*Twarikh Guru Khalsa*' also mention this episode and write that when Guru Amar Das declined Akbar's proposal, Akbar gifted the land to *Bibi Bhani* after saying that she is like her daughter.[29] *Giani Gian Singh* states that the *Panchs* of Sultanvind, Gumtali, and Gillanwali had donated their lands in the name of Guru Amardas as a gift.[30] According to *Gurbilas Patshahi Chbevin*, this is the same place where Guru Ram Das established Amritsar.[31] Mohinder Kaur Gill writes, quoting the '*Amritsar Gazetteer of 1883-84*', that Guru Ram Das obtained this land from Emperor Akbar in 1577. He paid seven hundred rupees to the landlords of Tung, who owned the land.[32] On the basis of all this discussion, it can be concluded that whether this land was gifted by Akbar or the Guru Ram Das bought it, this land was connected with *Bibi Bhani* directly or indirectly. But Santokh Singh

mentions in '*Sri Gur Pratap Suraj Granth*' that this land was gifted by Emperor Akbar and that it was the place where Guru Ram Das established Amritsar. This shows that women have been given equal rights in Sikhism, one example of which was land acquisition in the name of *Bibi Bhani*. Gyani Kirpal Singh, quoting the Amritsar Gazetteer, writes that this land was acquired by Guru Ramdas before Akbar's gift. This land was obtained by him, with the advice of Akbar, from the *zamindars* of the village by paying seven-hundred rupees.[33]

3. Guru Amar Das, at the age of eighty-two, established '*Manji Pratha*' and *Pibri* system for Sikh preaching. At this time, Guru Amar Das also assigned Sikh women as preachers. Among them, *Bibi Dani* and *Bibi Bhani* were also included. Both of them lived in Goindwal, preached about the teachings of Sikhism, and led Sikh women here.[34] According to S. S. Gandhi, Guru Amar Das also established the '*Peerah*' system. For this, Sikh women were appointed to preach about Sikhism. *Bibi Bhani* was the supervisor of many of these *peerahs*.

4. Even in the time of her husband, Guru Ram Das, *Bibi Bhani* served the *langar* responsibility. *Bibi Bhani* continued to fulfil this responsibility with a sense of service and never tried to take responsibility herself.[35] When Sahib Singh describes the practice of *langar* at the time of Guru Ram Das, he writes that the *langar* was served by *Bibi Bhani*. [36]

5. *Bibi Bhani*, even after becoming a mother, always favoured the truth without taking another side. Prithi Chand, the eldest son of *Bibi Bhani* was very jealous. He wanted to secure the royal legacy of the Guru for himself but always kept away from service. Prithi Chand used to think that it was his birth right. *Bibi Bhani*, on the other hand, was a faithful follower of the tradition of Sikh Gurus. *She* only proved the fact that truth always wins. *Bibi Bhani* proved the fact that the royal seat of *Guru-Gaddi* is not a matter of right and cannot be inherited; it goes only to the one who deserves it and to the one who proves worthy by doing service to Guru.[37]

6. *Bibi Bhani* was always a helpful companion to his younger son, Guru Arjan Dev. Guru Arjan Dev did many great things all together. The construction of buildings, the editing of *Guru Granth Sahib* and the creation of *Gurbani* on such a large scale were

undoubtedly great works. Very patiently, she did contribute to all the work. She was the best consultant for Guru Arjan Dev. *Giani* Gian Singh writes that before becoming a guru, *Bibi* Bhani explained to Arjan Dev that obeying the parents' permission is the main religion of a son, you should be in the service and obedience of the father, the *gurgaddi* comes only to a true servant.[38] This shows that *Bibi* Bhani gave importance to the ideals and principles of *Guru Ghar* by rising above the love of son.

7. *Bibi* Bhani also performed the duty of mother-in-law well, which is clear from these things. According to *Giani* Gian Singh, after hearing the news of Mata Ganga's pregnancy, Prithi Chand's wife used to quarrel at home. *Bibi* Bhani used to forbid him at this time. *Bibi* Bhani requested Arjan Dev send her and *Bibi* Ganga to another village, and then they were going to Wadali village, where grandson, Hargobind was born.[39] When the officials of the Mughal Emperor Jahangir arrested Guru Arjan Dev, *Bibi* Bhani maintained her self-control and did not let even her daughter-in-law, Mata Ganga. *Bibi* Bhani very calmly prepared herself for her son's martyrdom and taught her eleven-years old grandson to abide by God's will.[40]

Based on the above description, it can be concluded that *Bibi* Bhani was an embodiment of service, truth, and modesty. She was a mark of respect, endurance, and unique character. She has a unique place in Sikh history. *Bibi* Bhani's service is an example of why we should not differentiate between a girl and a boy. She kept serving her father, Guru Amar Das, before marriage and after marriage. When Guru Ram Das became Guru, *Bibi* Bhani became Guru's wife (Guru Ram Das) and later mother of Guru (Guru Arjan Dev) and grandmother of the Guru's. No other guru's wife has had such good fortune. *Bibi* Bhani's family had to make great sacrifices so that the temple of Sikhism could be built with a strong foundation. She established the tradition with her service that there was no difference between a son and a daughter. Both can serve equally. She kept serving her father even after her marriage. Being the daughter of Guru Amardas, *Bibi* Bhani got the honour of serving more than the sons. She always favoured the truth, and she proved this when she did not cooperate with Prithi Chand, who was of a jealous nature. He wanted to secure

the royal legacy of the Guru for himself but always kept away from service. She was also a helpful companion to Guru Arjan Dev. When Guru Arjan Dev was imprisoned by Mughal rulers, she did not let even her daughter-in-law, Mata Ganga. She encouraged her grandson, Guru Hargobind, to maintain high morale. She contributed significantly to the promotion of *Gurmat*, solving the problems of *Guru-Ghar*, building *langar-pangat* and *Sangat* institutions. *Bibi Bhani* was also an able administrator of the *langar*, and she herself served in the *Langar*. Served during the *Piri* system. Santokh Singh, while appreciating her, writes that she was a noble and great woman with large fortunes whose father was considered a guru by the world.

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37. Mohinder Kaur Gill, *Guru Naari Jeevan Vihar: Guru Wives (Mahals, Guru Betiyan ate Nubb)*, Arsee Publishers, New Delhi, 2015, p. 107., also see, Santokh Singh, *Sri Gur Partap Suraj Granth, Vol. V*, (ed.), Bhai Vir Singh, Bhasa Vibhag Punjab, 2011, p. 1754.
38. Sahib Singh, *Jivan Birtant Sri Guru Ram Das Ji*, Singh Brothers, Amritsar, 1990, p. 58.
39. Mohinder Kaur Gill, *The Role and Status of Women in Sikhism*, National Book Shop, Ludhiana, 1995, p. 107.
40. Giani Gian Singh, *Twarikh Guru Khalsa, Vol. I*, (ed.), K. S. Raju, Bhasa Vibhag, Punjab, 1993, p. 406.

**POPULIST NARRATIVES AND THE SIKH IMAGINATION**  
**INTRODUCING A BOOK**  
***THE INDIAN FARMERS' PROTEST OF 2020–21***

**AMANDEEP SINGH\***

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*Author: Christine Moliner and David Singh*

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As aptly titled, *The Indian Farmers' Protest of 2020-21* (hereafter: *Farmers' Protest*), is indeed an important collection of eighteen essays that provides critical insights into one of the largest protests in the history of India against the three agrarian laws passed by Indian Parliament in September 2020. Following these agitations all three laws i.e. Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020; Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020; Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020, were eventually repealed on December 01, 2021. Taking note of these demonstrations at the crossroads of social and political mobilization, transcending many established identities (caste, religion etc.), and accompanied by the emergence of new alliances and polarities, these essays take the reader through the many nuances of evolving situations that emerged during the span of more than a yearlong standoff. Although, for lack of space, it may not be possible to comment on every article, an understanding of the broader framework makes it clear that while populism and populist politics can be instruments of electoral success, these protests demonstrate how they can also serve as an important source of dissent

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and political resistance. Drawing my arguments from Ernesto Laclau's *On Populist Reason*, I shall take a further in-depth analysis of this book.

Drawing upon Peter Worsley's works, Laclau debunks the myth about populism primarily as a process of political mobilization that is foregrounded in propagation of some form of 'false consciousness.' (Laclau 2018, 15). Expressing his agreement with Worsley he contests such theorization as a 'reductionist attempt at seeing a spurious dimension of manipulation as necessary constitutive of populism.' (Laclau 2018, 15). Against the backdrop assumption of populism as some kind of political manipulation that draws its validity from emotive power of rhetorics underpinned by simple dichotomies of two polar choices, Laclau considers alternative ways of looking at populism as organizing the context of understanding situations that leads to construction of a new social. For Laclau this new social is constructed through complex relationships between many individual demands within the populist camp that get integrated into a whole leading to emergence of a 'popular identity.' The consolidation of identity is reaffirmed as a political viability with the dichotomous division of society into two camps that remain politically antagonistic. He notes, 'The exact meaning of these findings remains, however, necessarily undetermined until we establish more precisely what is involved in the discursive construction both of an antagonistic frontier and of that particular articulation of equivalence and difference that we call 'popular identity.' (Laclau 2018, 83). Against Saussurean logical connection between differences, Laclau examines a 'broken space', as 'the experience of lack, a gap which has emerged in harmonious continuity of the social.' (Laclau 2018, 85). This lack in the first place is not merely external, drawn from outside, but an internal lack that denotes a missing fulness of one's being reflected in the community. He notes, 'There is a fulness of community that is missing.' (Laclau 2018, 85). The sense of lack leads to construction of a people giving name to such absent fulness. Therefore, while populism involves mobility of variables, it remains reliant on how political demand gets turned into a moral responsibility, unifying it into a moral politics that makes it worthy of agitation and even laying one's life for it. Oscillating between politics of confrontation and politics of negotiation, political, oral, and media narratives sharpen the divide that produces a general

demand into an identity of its own transitioning eventually into a state where the demand becomes merely ancillary to the identity. However, lacking a priori conceptual base that does not fit neatly into a structured system of the political and the historical, populism captures desires by reconciling established social logic and social imagination that employs mechanisms to convert desire into drive. Populism provides an achievement of social fulness, through construction of a hegemonic horizon that is very dynamic in nature while undefining any set definitions and redefining what has remained undefined. The discursive heterogeneity and fluctuating base of populism is often drawn from an outburst of emotions and passions rather than any internal metaphysical order or logic. Therefore, the logic is many a time drawn from the metaphysics of identity, settled as an ideological entity ontologized through history and genealogy.

**Signaling a moment of populist resistance, *Farmers' Protest* offers a rich and comprehensive account of how, while navigating diverse backgrounds of religion, region, and language, the movement forged a powerful alliance that galvanized the imagination of farmers across multiple communities, ultimately transgressing and reconfiguring these many floating identities into a single, unified one — the identity of the Farmer.** For theoretical purposes, we can classify the papers in this book into four categories, based on their underlying themes. The first category is based on the theme of narrative building. While foregrounding the ethical dimensions of the protests, several articles and some interviews in this volume theorize a constitutive tension between representations of “simple minded” farmers (bholebhale kisan) religiously resisting political repression and the capitalist, exploitative logic of the coercive state. Articles titled, ‘Farming Laws,’ by Pritam Singh; ‘India’s Farmers’ Movement and the ‘Agrarian Question,’ by Subir Sinha; ‘The Kisan Andolan and India’s Rollover Neoliberalism,’ by Kenneth Bo Nielsen and Alf Gunvald Nilsen; ‘*Sikhi* Idiom and the Making of the Punjabi Farmers’ Movement of 2020-2021,’ by Surinder Singh Jodhka; ‘Punjab’s Mandis, agrarian life and the Farmers’ Protest’, by Shreya Sinha; ‘Bodily Strategies in the Kisan Andolan,’ by Ananya Bhuyan; ‘The Protest,’ by Amandeep Sandhu and Gurshamshir Singh Waraich; and ‘Voices from the Andolan,’ by Sakshi Chindaliya and others; broadly examine the

strategies of sustenance and resistance, on ground narratives, persistent hardships of farmers, the media war, and all that enabled a prolonged mobilization on the roads and highways until the repeal of the farm laws.

The second category of articles like '*Kisan Andholan di Vaar*' by Virinder Kalra, and 'When Women Farmers protest Patriarchy and Capitalism,' by Floriane Bolazzi and others, offer insights into traditional heritage, folk sensibilities, farmer's pride, and gender ethos that played a pivotal role in mobilizing protestors and galvanizing cultural imagination. The third category of articles and interviews reveals the undercurrents of socio political dynamics, foregrounding the convergence of heterogeneous forces within a shared analytical space. These include 'The Political economy of the Farmers' protest,' by Gaurav Bansal; 'The farmers Movement and New Agrarian Politics in Northern India (2020-2021),' by Satendra Kumar; 'The Indian Farmers' Protest, 2020-2021,' by Varinder Kalra; 'The importance of Organizing,' by Aashita Dawer; 'The Dalit Perspective,' by Christine Moliner; and 'Learning from the Legacy of the Farmers' Movement,' by Shivan Mogha. Although Christine Moliner's paper, titled 'It is Baba Nanak Who is Running this Protest', offers an exclusive examination of the role of Sikhi in the farmers' protest, the Sikh perspective — and Sikhi more broadly — emerges as a fourth significant theme that cuts across many of the articles and can be treated as a distinct category for our discussion. Let me delve further into these categories.

Considering the degree of narrational investment for structuring the protests, it becomes pertinent to examine how heterogeneity of protesting voices is negotiated and integrated into production of a homogeneous network of collective representation. Surinder Singh Jodhka notes, 'There was a near-complete unanimity across all sections of the farmers on the repeal of the three laws.' (Jodhka 2025, 66). Drawing on information from multiple media reports and field studies, theoretical interventions such as Jodhka's not only describe how latent mechanisms energized the protests but also illustrate how these mechanisms functioned as a negotiating space in which diverse voices were integrated into a homogeneous whole. **Given the broader scope of the topic, the undercurrent of many articles on *Farmers'***

**Protest** offer a scholarly support to the movement making the farmers' cause plausible for intellectual consumption. In other words, while discussing the draconian, pro capitalist nature of the farm laws which, as many have contested, were politically designed without taking farmer distress into account, these articles highlight the plight of the farmers, their modes of resistance and failures of postcolonial capitalism. Therefore, while Subir Sinha characterizes the farmers' movement as a form of agrarian populism that resists the authoritarian populism of the state, other scholars—including Pritam Singh, Kenneth Bo Nielsen, and Alf Gunvald Nilsen—highlight the nexus between India's capitalist development, the propagation of Hindu nationalism, and the assertive use of mechanisms of state coercion—processes pursued through broader governmental policy frameworks, of which the farm laws constituted a key component. Highlighting his concerns about the farm laws' potential to erode livelihoods of farmers, Pritam Singh—albeit with a degree of extrapolation—foregrounds the ill effects of farm laws not only on agriculture but also on a wide range of other domains as a collateral damage. These include their adverse ramifications for federal state relations, the annihilation of religious identities, potential rise in carbon emissions and pollution leading to ecological destruction, as well as an anticipated deleterious impact on democracy, diversity, and virtually every aspect of modern civic life. At a broader discursive level, the knowledge these articles generate continues to produce a mode of polarized identification — one that not only frames the tension simply as a contest between farmers and the state, but instead recasts its reasoning through production of moral binaries: absolute virtue set against absolute vice, ethical integrity opposed to calculated malice etc. Such foundational context is frequently invoked as a constitutive narrative framing the eventual repeal of laws as the ultimate triumph of the truth over falsehood running across different commentaries in *Farmers' Protest*.

Conceptualizing the cultural undercurrent of the protests is the second important theme discussed in *Farmers' Protest*. Operating within the Punjabi cultural landscape not only enables the dissemination of information to mobilize protestors—fostering confidence and faith in

the justness of the cause—but, more importantly, cultivates a persuasive call to prepare for determined resistance, functioning as a site where the challenge is confronted head on. **Virinder Kalra highlights how cultural diffusion through diverse modes of symbols and symbolic formulations in music video albums and live performances by singers, emerged as a key factor in motivating and mobilizing protestors. Take for instance, in one of the songs *Asi Vaddange* (We will chop), he notes, ‘a strong sense of masculine resistance and the feminization of the enemy — *Dilliye* (‘Delhi — the government) — were consistent tropes.’ (Kalra 2025, 148).** The cultural energy that remained dominant throughout the protests foregrounded a radical insistence on the complete repeal of the three laws. The absolute refusal to engage in any alternative forms of negotiation until this fundamental demand was met, effectively drew a rigid line of separation—not between what could or could not be negotiated for the broader prosperity of agriculture, but rather to emphatically assert a stark victory versus defeat binary. For example, no negotiation on increasing the Minimum Support Price (MSP) for pulses, that could make pulse cultivation at par with wheat and rice ever surfaced from the protests. Similarly, no proposals to increase the alternative sources of income, like setting up government sponsored rural agricultural infrastructure including cold storages, packaging units etc., that could increase market accessibility and reduce farm losses for perishable foods, were brought to table. Considering the gradual soil erosion along with falling water table to dangerously low levels in the region occurring due to set wheat-rice cropping pattern, alternative negotiation could not only have been reasonable consideration to overcome the deadlock, but rather a very necessity of the hour. Yet in many ways a predetermined foundational deadlock that Kalra mentions was propagated as ‘*haund di larai* (fight for existence/survival)’, offsetting the consideration of alternative possibilities, foregrounding a failed opportunity or rather a conscious choice made for enjoying an explicit symbolic victory propagated through folk songs. (Kalra 2025, 152). Nevertheless, while remaining focused almost exclusively on securing the repeal of the laws the protests did succeed in their one fundamental aim — producing a moment of significant embarrassment for the government for the first

time since it took office.

Nevertheless, what remains significant is that, despite the spirited undercurrent of resistance, numerous internal obstacles continue to undermine the movement's ability to articulate its historically revolutionary character, limiting its potential beyond a largely populist uprising. In other words, although the protests were multivalent in many ways, their very internal composition — despite the best efforts and diverse forms of expression — ultimately constrained their historical logic and prevented them from developing into a genuinely revolutionary movement. This was perhaps because the alliances formed within the protests were largely momentary—strategic enough to generate a populist impact, yet lacking the structural depth needed to sustain the struggle beyond the set immediate goal of repealing the laws.

This can also be understood in the context of a long running land rights movement that has at times erupted into violent clashes, such as the 2019 confrontation in Bhattiwal Kalan village in Sangrur district, where Dalit farmers struggling to secure their right to cultivate reserved farmland came into direct conflict with dominant caste Jat landlords who had taken control of their land. Although the incident did not receive much international media coverage, it still reflects a moment when one community of farmers violently obstructed the socially marginalized peasantry from exercising their right to become cultivators. Examining a similar structural void of transformative potential within the farmers protests of 2020-21, Kalra offers an important observation. He notes, 'the farmers' protest was primarily an issue for those who owned land, rather than those who worked on it, either as tillers or tenants.' (Kalra 2025, 170). A similar observation is made by Gaurav Bansal, who, while examining statistical data, notes how the concentration of the means of production, including land purchase, land leasing, and farm machinery, has produced a class division between the capital rich, resourceful farmer (the *takdajimidar*) and the marginal, resource poor farmer (the *maadajimidar*). Discussing how deeply the resourceful farmers were invested in mobilizing the agitation, he notes, 'Another observation from the field was that it was this class-category of farmers who seemed most vociferous and

were often agitated when others were not ‘serious enough’ in their participation in the movement.’ (Bansal 2025, 82). Bansal’s observation needs to be contextualized against the backdrop of the popular narrative that positions the marginal farmer as most vulnerable to the capitalist orientation of the farm laws.

The third widely discussed theme in *Farmers’ Protests* is the socio-political undercurrent enunciated through the discussions on farmer identity, particularly, the ways in which this identity gets socially contextualized as gender and caste. While undertaking a discussion on women participation and how patterns of patriarchy were unsettled through women participation in the protests, Bolazzi and others have highlighted how women farmers have traditionally remained neglected, underpaid, and exploited in rural spaces, that demarcated their inferior social status. While emphasizing the massive participation of women in the protests, these scholars have also explored the stakes of ‘aspiration to establish a viable agricultural model, not a ‘glass and steel’ agriculture intended for export and speculation, but a logical agriculture aimed at feeding local population.’ (Bolazzi 2025, 123).

Further, the discussion on farmer identity and caste politics in the articles particularly by Satendra Kumar, Christine Moliner, and Shivam Mogha provide an opportunity to take a closer look at socio-political structuring that reveals a historical closure of identity politics and usurping of political power drawn from such posturing. Laclau reminds how empty signifiers are often filled with rhetorics because there remains a lack inherent to the language of its expression in exact terms. He notes, ‘the political construction of ‘the people’ is...essentially catachrestical.’ (Laclau 2018, 72). It is important to note that the identity of a ‘farmer’ functions not only as an expression of the conceptual unity of being an agriculturist, but also as a social figure that is instantly evoked in the popular imagination whenever the idea of a farmer is invoked. Kumar notes, ‘the farmers protest of 2020-2021 not only brought agrarian politics to the forefront but also revived the Jats’ kisan identity and renewed the agrarian polity on a broader and possibly more inclusive basis than in the past.’ (Kumar 2025, 104). With a wide range of discussions on caste in many articles in *Farmers’ Protest*, it becomes evident that the recollection of identity

of the farmer is not merely a nostalgic image of the past, but a continuous cultural intervention at work promoted through cultural moors, social posturing, popular grapevines, pranks, symbols of social pride, and all that social paraphernalia that is constantly invigorated over generations stabilized in images and imaginations, where the image of the Jat consistently emerges as the custodian of farming. In other words, there is always a silent agency at work in this setup, wherein the cultural idea of the 'farmer' is almost instantly absorbed into a caste framework—one in which 'farmer' and 'Jat' become synonymous. As a result, a large section of farmers from diverse social backgrounds who have practiced agriculture for generations—such as Lubana, Kamboj, Saini, Rajput, as well as Muslims and the large population of landless Dalit laborers and peasants—are rendered secondary, appearing only as ancillary figures invoked as farmers only to build large turnout for mass mobilization. Although substantial literature, particularly the work of sociologists such as Jodhka, has insightfully examined the intertwining of farmer identity and caste, *Farmers' Protest* once again brought this question to the forefront with renewed depth and urgency.

Sikhi is another widely debated theme that can be found broadly discussed in *Farmers' Protest*. The book highlights how theoretical understanding of the role of Sikhi in the farmers' agitation is indeed a historically constructed phenomenon, with complex weaving of many strands. Necessitating a multilayered reading of events to unpack Sikhis' constitutive role as a structuring principle of the protests, a broader discourse on the subject opens up multiple registers of psychological and political patterns underpinning the agitations. Take for example, while examining the terrain of on-ground discourses, Moliner highlights an episode that implores the undercurrents of narratives binding Sikhi to the demonstrations. She notes,

A farmer from Bathinda district, who serves as head granthi ('priest') in his village gurdwara, explained in the following terms the far-reaching consequences of these laws:

With these laws, it was not just agriculture that would have been affected, but everything else, because agriculture is at the root of our society; our entire ecosystem is dependent upon farming. Our religion and culture would have been affected. These laws are very dangerous

in that respect; they are a slow poison. By controlling food, they can push us to do any-thing, even change and finish religion. (Moliner 2025, 178)

Of note in the above discussion is not only a surplus logic that articulates the deep anxieties surrounding the movement, but also a recalcitrant emphasis of Sikhis' intertwining with farmer agitation rendering an active impetus for movement of consciousness from ethical to spiritual. What may otherwise seem enigmatic, if not outrightly preposterous, is a latent attempt in common man's language to foreground a connection between adoption of parliamentary agricultural laws with the 'finishing of religion.' Although the episode reflects only a rudimentary understanding, the intensity of anxiety at the grassroots echoes an unconscious persistence of a symbolic framework, signaling a phantasmic void in the psychological makeup. This void, which is fundamentally a void of self-loss, triggered with the passing of new farming laws, reveals the fragility of the absolute. While drawing a social sanction from farming as the 'root of the society,' the symbolic posturing of farmer draws its spiritual authority from Sikhi. In many ways, it operates as a near perfect instantiation of a political ontology — described by various scholars as *bond* (beingness) or *bond di larai* (a struggle for selfhood) — that, when subjected to a stress test, enabled ostensibly simple minded peasants (bhole bhale kisan) to articulate an ethical propulsion in resistance to the draconian laws of an unethical state. (Jodhka 2025, 72; Moliner 2025, 178, 180).

Nevertheless, while the use of Sikh symbols have remained very central to farmers' protest, yet this usage has also produced a heterogenous deadlock as a constitutive site where many contradictory claims often emerge to the surface. This deadlock as highlighted by Sandhu and Waraich, has remained instrumental to tar the agitations with the paint of Khalistani movement, yet the farmers on the other hand have relied on these symbols to galvanizing imagination to offer a 'spiritual' resistance. A close reading of the Farmers' Protest reveals a careful navigation in the deployment of Sikh symbols—one that requires subtle caution to avoid their potential politicized debasement, while simultaneously enabling a strategic clearing of space for identity assertion, thereby facilitating the cultural appropriation of Sikhi as a

mode of resistance and the activation of symbolic power.

In a nutshell *Farmers Protest* is a must read for understanding deeper nuances of politics, culture, and social frameworks that revolve around the fears of losing not only income from the occupation of farming but also *bond*, self-hood and self-image. Central to this work is the argument how farmer identity, along with its social and caste baggage, gets articulated expressing uncompromisingly stellar resistance, and, most importantly, securing a traditional access to both symbolic and political power. Although there are many other possible ways to approach the text — such as examining possible measures to enhance agricultural income and strengthen agriculture at the grassroots level, exploring gender issues and the mechanisms through which patriarchy is maintained in rural spaces, or addressing questions of caste and social justice — the instrumental use of religion to secure political power, while simultaneously offsetting its tenets to consolidate social hierarchy as a form of power, remains a crucial theme that warrants further discussion. I and Gurpreet Singh have, elsewhere, touched upon discussions of such a multilayered understanding of the farmers' protest.<sup>1</sup>

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#### Notes.

1. For more information see, Singh, A., & Singh, G. 2022. Farm laws and farmer agitation: Agricultural economics and undercurrents of Punjab politics. *Sikh Formations*, 18(1–2), 170–185. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17448727.2021.2020975>

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## ON THE ISC FRONT

KANWAL PAL SINGH\*

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During the first quarter of 2026 (January–March), the International Sikh Confederation (ISC) advanced a series of meaningful outreach and commemorative initiatives. Alongside these efforts, the Confederation broadened its engagement with stakeholders at both national and international levels.

On 7<sup>th</sup> January, 2026, ISC submitted a representation to the Hon'ble Chief Minister of Punjab, S Bhagwant Singh Mann, arising from the Conclave '*The Way Forward*' held to commemorate the 350th Martyrdom Anniversary of Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib, titled '*Religious Conversions in Punjab*.' Eminent Sikh personalities from academia, administration, judiciary, journalism, Sikh institutions, *et al*, had participated and deliberated on the issue. ISC shared the two resolutions related with the Government of Punjab, and urged the CM Punjab to strengthen communities through education, cultural engagement, and economic empowerment as safeguards against exploitation, while affirming that any anti-conversion law would contradict Sikh philosophy of freedom of conscience, dignity of choice, and respect for all faiths. The Confederation requested due consideration of these resolutions in future policy framing.

On 29<sup>th</sup> January, 2026, ISC addressed a representation to Shri Kinjarapu Rammohan Naidu, Hon'ble Minister of Civil Aviation, Government of India, highlighting the urgent need for enhanced international connectivity from Chandigarh. While Chandigarh is designated as an international airport, its only current overseas service is to Dubai/ Sharjah, compelling travelers from Punjab, Haryana, and

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Himachal Pradesh to rely on indirect routes via Delhi and other airports. ISC emphasized that direct flights to London, Singapore, and Amsterdam from Chandigarh would significantly ease travel for the diaspora world wide, reduce costs and time, and strengthen India's cultural and economic ties globally. The Confederation requested the Ministry's kind consideration to initiate these vital connections, underscoring their potential to promote tourism and regional development.

On 29<sup>th</sup> January, 2026, ISC submitted another representation to Shri Kinjarapu Rammohan Naidu, Hon'ble Minister of Civil Aviation, urging the initiation of direct air connectivity between Chandigarh International Airport (IXC) and Sri Guru Ram Dass Jee International Airport (ATQ), Amritsar. The appeal highlighted Amritsar's spiritual, cultural, and historical significance as home to Sri Harmandar Sahib and other major heritage sites, alongside its role as a hub of trade and industry. Chandigarh was emphasized as a modern capital city and gateway to Himachal Pradesh, with its own strong tourism appeal. ISC underscored that direct flights between the two cities would greatly benefit pilgrims, tourists, business travelers, and senior citizens, while fostering regional trade, tourism, and economic growth. The Confederation proposed an initial schedule of twice-weekly or once daily flights to assess demand and optimize service, requesting the Ministry's kind consideration to make this vital connectivity a reality.

On 9<sup>th</sup> February, 2026, ISC issued a reminder to the Hon'ble President of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) regarding the non-inclusion of prominent Sikh organizations in the 34-Member Committee constituted to frame service rules for the Hon'ble Jathedar of Sri Akal Takht Sahib. While acknowledging the initiative, ISC reiterated its earlier request (letter dated 28<sup>th</sup> August, 2025) for the inclusion of national and international Sikh bodies whose contributions to the Panth are widely recognized. The Confederation emphasized that such inclusion would enhance the credibility and comprehensiveness of the Committee and safeguard the sovereignty and independence of Sri Akal Takht Sahib, both in spirit and practice. ISC urged the SGPC to give due consideration to this request and communicate an early reply.

Despite ISC's earlier representation dated 2<sup>nd</sup> December, 2025, no response or apology has been received from the Editor-in-Chief of *The Tribune*. On 9<sup>th</sup> February, 2026, ISC had issued a reminder to *The Tribune* regarding the misleading headline published on 26<sup>th</sup> November, 2025, titled, '*Op Sindoor legacy of Guru's valour: Modi*' which not only distorts the Prime Minister's words but is also a gross misrepresentation of the sacred legacy of the Sikh Guru. The Guru's legacy is rooted in his supreme sacrifice for religious freedom, human rights, and interfaith harmony. The Confederation expressed disappointment at the silence of the Editor-in-Chief, and reiterated that journalistic ethics demand a public apology, urging *The Tribune* to act without further delay to uphold accuracy, respect, and public trust.

On 25<sup>th</sup> February, 2026, ISC submitted a representation to the Hon'ble Chief Minister of Punjab, S Bhagwant Singh Mann, emphasizing the urgent need for a high-quality Punjabi–Punjabi monolingual dictionary. ISC highlighted that while bilingual dictionaries (Punjabi–English/ English–Punjabi) exist, the absence of a comprehensive monolingual resource hampers mastery of the mother tongue. The letter further underscored the importance of developing an advanced online Punjabi dictionary, modernizing vocabulary to include scientific, technical, legal, and medical terms, as well as expanding the linguistic heritage by incorporating words from Gurbani. ISC proposed that the responsibility for this project be entrusted to the Punjab Language Department and/or Punjabi University, Patiala, ensuring cultural sensitivity, sustainability, and scholarly rigor. The Confederation affirmed that such a dictionary would be a historic achievement and a lasting gift to Punjab, Punjabi, and the global Punjabi community.

On 23<sup>rd</sup> February, 2026, S Chamkaur Singh, a progressive farmer from Village Gholian visited the office of the ISC and held a meeting with the Secretary General and General Secretary. He briefed the Confederation on various activities related to organic farming and highlighted the challenges currently being faced by farmers in Punjab. He shared details of his initiatives wherein farmers have come together to showcase a collective organic farming project. ISC encouraged him to prepare a comprehensive project plan for the entire state, so that

the proposal could be taken up with the appropriate authorities. The Confederation reiterated its commitment to promoting sustainable agriculture, reducing dependence on chemical inputs, and supporting farmer-led initiatives that safeguard health, environment, and economic resilience.

ISC extends its warm congratulations to Dr Jaspal Kaur Kaang on her distinguished appointment as Professor of Eminence at Sri Guru Granth Sahib World University, Fatehgarh Sahib; S Gurbir Singh for President, Institute Of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh; and Dr Birendra Kaur for Vice President, Sikh Educational Society, Chandigarh. ISC recognized these honors as a befitting acknowledgment to their dedication and commitment to Sikh studies and education. As valued members of ISC's Executive Committee, their elevation to these esteemed positions is a proud moment for the Confederation. ISC conveys heartfelt appreciation and best wishes to all of them.

## SOME PROMINENT SIKH SCIENTISTS

A REVIEW BY PROF HARDEV SINGH VIRK\*

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*Author: Prof. Surjit Singh Bhatti, Raja Balraj Singh & Rajbir Singh*

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Prof. (Dr.) Surjit Singh Bhatti is an established author in both Science and Literature. Presently, he is Chief Editor of a literary monthly magazine “sanjhvirasat.org”. Dr Bhatti has been my student in Layallpur Kh. College, Jalandhar (1963) and a colleague in GND University, Amritsar (1979-2002). He specialised in Ultrasonics and guided research in Acoustics, Glasses, and Superconductivity. The sub-title of the book, “*Highlighting the Unique Contributions of Some Prominent Sikh Scientists*” justifies the selection of Scientists for this volume.

The book under review has 14 Chapters based on life and achievements of 15 Sikh scientists. Dr Jai Rup Singh in his Foreword writes: “The remarkable contributions of the Sikh community on the tapestry of human achievements stand out as a testament to their resilience, innovation, and brilliance. This book gives a brief account of the discoveries and patented inventions of some of them who have left an indelible mark on the world”. In the Preface, author writes: “*The Aim* of writing this book is to highlight the less known contributions of some exceptionally brilliant and dedicated Sikhs who have distinguished themselves as great scientists, doctors, engineers, technocrats, agriculturists, innovators and educationists”. Towards the

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end of the Preface, he sums up his aim: "Hope this book will not only provide interesting and useful information about the life and achievements of 'Some Prominent Sikh Scientists' in simple words but will also be a source of inspiration for the younger generation".

Chapters 1-3 describe the achievements of three prominent Sikh scientists, namely, Prof. Puran Singh, Bawa Kartar Singh, and Narinder Singh (NS) Kapany. In my book, "Professor Puran Singh: Scientist, Poet, and Philosopher", I explored all aspects of his life and achievements after searching archives of FRI (Forest Research Institute), Dehradun. But Dr Bhatti has gone ahead calling him "*Sixth River of the Panjab*" and the "*Tagore of Panjab*", "*Pioneering Industrial Chemist of India; Chemist of Forest Products*", and "*An amalgam of Sikhi, Science, and Spirituality*". He has recounted major influences on the life of Puran Singh and highlighted his research work in FRI (1908-18) as an Imperial Chemist. He was the first Sikh and the first Indian scientist to focus his research on the 'Forest Products of India'. The author has used simple terminology to explain his research work, which was published in scientific journals in India and Japan.

Bawa Kartar Singh was a descendant of Guru Amar Das, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Guru of the Sikhs, who was educated in Cambridge university and got his "*Triplos in the Natural Sciences*" in 1906. He was a pioneer and called "*Father of Stereo-Chemistry in India*". He was awarded D.Sc. degrees by University of Dublin (1921) and University of Cambridge (1941). He served as Professor of Chemistry in Govt. College, Dacca (1910-18); Govt. College, Lahore (1918-21); Ravenshaw College, Cuttack (1921-36); and Patna University, Patna (1936-40). After his retirement in 1940 from IES (Indian Education Service), he served as a Professor Emeritus at the University of Allahabad upto 1946, and then at Panjab University, during 1947-48. He worked as Honorary Professor from 1948 to 1960 at Banaras Hindu University (BHU). He is the only Sikh Scientist who was selected as a Nominator to Chemistry Nobel Prize by the Swedish Academy of Sciences. He himself deserved the Nobel Prize for his path-breaking research in Stereo-Chemistry.

NS Kapany was a Sikh scientist of Indian origin, who is known as "*Father of Fibre Optics*" and has revolutionized all communication systems by bending the light in high-speed fibre cables. Dr Kapany

founded his own companies, like *Optics Technology Inc.*, *Kaptronics*, and *K2 Optronics* which brought him recognition as an Entrepreneur. For his many contributions in the field of Fiber Optics technology, he was awarded 120 Patents, and was made a Member of the National Patents Council of USA. Dr Narinder Singh Kapany was the most deserving Sikh scientist, who was ignored to receive the Nobel Prize in Physics.

Chapter 4 is focussed on Dr Sohan Singh Hayreh (FRCS), a distinguished Indo-American Sikh Ophthalmologist, and a pioneer in Fluorescent Angiography and Vascular Diseases of the Eye and the Optic Nerve. The author has summed up his research work as follows: “He pioneered the *Fluorescein Angiography technique* and became a leading authority in ‘Vascular Diseases of the Eye and the Optic Nerve’ where arteries, veins, and blood vessels are most affected. For over six decades, he was involved in experimental clinical research dealing with ocular circulation, optic disc and the optic nerve, retina and choroidal disorders, glaucomatous optic neuropathy (progressive loss of retina cells causing blindness), changes in fundus (interior surface of eye, opposite the lens) in malignant arterial hypertension, ocular neovascularization (due to infection, trauma or glaucoma), rheumatologic disorders of the eye and nocturnal arterial hypotension (defects of the eyes caused due to high blood pressure at night), and some other eye diseases”. Dr Hayreh’s publications include more than 400 peer-reviewed research papers, 16 books and monographs on eye diseases and 50 specialized topics as Book Chapters.

*Padma Shri* Dr Harkishan Singh (Chapter 5) was an Eminent Pharmacologist, and a Medical Science Historian. He was instrumental in setting up NIPER (*National Institute of Pharmaceutical Education and Research*) at SAS Nagar (Mohali). After graduation from Panjab University in 1950 in Pharmacy, he earned the degree of M. Pharm. in 1952, and Ph.D. in 1956, both from Banaras Hindu University (BHU), Varanasi. He then went to USA and was awarded D.Sc. degree by Philadelphia University. He discovered a new synthetic neuro-muscular blocker, which he named as *Chandonium Iodide* (HS-310) and tested it at the University of Strathclyde, Glasgow (Scotland). India’s Central Drug Research Institute (CDRI), Lucknow, and Ministry of Health, Government of India, approved this drug. He published about

350 research papers in journals, 18 Book Chapters and obtained 14 patents. *Chando coronium*, the drug discovered by Dr Harkishan Singh, is so far the only new drug discovered by any Indian University.

Dr Khem Singh Gill (Chapter 6), Dr Devinder Singh Chahal (Chapter 8), and Dr Gurdev Singh Khush (Chapter 9) are all products of PAU Ludhiana. *Padma Bhushan* Khem Singh Gill was a pioneer of Wheat Breeding, and Father of Green Revolution in India. He was a Vice Chancellor at Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana. His research was focussed on breeding new strains of Wheat, Linseed and Sesame. He became popular for breeding a hybrid of wheat and Rye which is pest-resistant. Triticale is used as a fodder and has also been used to produce *vodka*.

Dr Devinder Singh Chahal has worked in very important areas of Microbiology in Montreal (Quebec) for four decades and discovered new procedures for bioconversion of many biological wastes into clean fuel, human food and animal feed. After retirement, he established the *Institute for Understanding Sikhism* at Laval, in Quebec, for research in Sikh philosophy and spiritualism. He has published half a dozen books, the most important being "*Nanakian Philosophy*".

Dr Gurdev Singh Khush is the First Sikh FRS, Distinguished Agronomist and Geneticist, top Rice Breeder of the East, and working at the prestigious International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), Philippines. He has produced 300 new variants/varieties of rice. Both Khem Singh Gill and Gurdev Singh Khush collaborated to produce new varieties of Wheat and Rice to remove hunger from the third world countries. Dr Khush has published more than 350 research papers and won several International Awards.

Dr. Kartar Singh Lalvani OBE (Chapter 7) is a Pharma-Medical Innovator with 15 Patents and is called the "*Vitamin King*". Dr Lalvani discovered new formulations for oral ulcer and skin problems and unique food supplements with vitamins and micro-nutrients for improved healthcare. In 1971, he established his own manufacturing facility, named as *Vita-Biotics*, to produce his newly discovered products in England.

Dr Naranjan Singh Dhalla is FRSC (Canada), and World's leading

Cardiovascular Scientist. He is member of the Order of Manitoba and Order of Canada, inducted into the Canadian Medical Hall of Fame. He was appointed (Founder) Director of the St Boniface Hospital and Albrechtsen Research Centre at Winnipeg (Manitoba), a position he held until 2006. He has designed improved drug therapies for some serious diseases, like Congestive Heart Failure (CHF), Ischemia Perfusion Injury and Ischemic Heart Disease (IHD) following narrowing of heart arteries, and the common diabetes induced *Cardiomyopathy*. He has published more than 850 research papers, 650 Chapters/Abstracts, and ten books.

Chapters 11-14 are devoted to life and achievements of Drs. Harvinder Singh Sahota; Raghbir Singh Khandpur; Gurtej Singh Sandhu; Jasbir Singh Sethi, and Santokh Singh Badesha. Dr Sahota is among World's Leading Cardiologists, Inventor of Perfusion Balloon Angioplasty with 24 Patents for Cardiac Devices. He is known as "*Hero of American Hearts*". Dr Khandpur is Founder & Director General Centres for Electronic Design & Technology of India; creator of Science City and Tele-Medicine. He Invented LINAC and other Novel Patented Biomedical Instrumentation. India's topmost National Award was given to him for best *Science Communication* by Department of Science & Technology (DST), Government of India. He was UNDP/WHO *consultant* to Burma (1983), Somalia (1984), Bangladesh (1988), Egypt (1991), Afghanistan (1992), Iraq (1995), Syria (1988, 1993, 1996), and Kuwait (1994, 1998, 1999).

Dr Gurtej Singh Sandhu has been Gold Medallist of first batch of M.Sc. (Hons.) Physics in GND University, Amritsar in 1983. He is a prolific Inventor in IC Technology Chips and Devices and credited with more than 1400 Patents (2024). He is today *the Fifth Highest Inventor of the World*. In 1991, Dr Sandhu started working as a Senior Engineer at Micron Technologies Inc. at Boise, Idaho. Since 2014, he occupies the position of the *Vice-President of Micron Technologies Inc.*, Idaho. He is actively involved with a broad range of process technologies for the IC processing industry. In 2018, he received the *Andrew S. Grove Award*, named after the Co-founder of *Intel Corporation*.

Sardar Jasbir Singh Sethi and Dr Santokh Singh Badesha are two Distinguished American Sikh Scientists. Mr Sethi was leader of a group

of engineers who designed the first largest nuclear power plant in USA. Dr Badesha is an Organic Chemist who is now a 'Distinguished Professor' at Purdue University (Indiana) and Corporate Fellow and Manager Open-Innovation, at Xerox Corporation, New York. He is an elected Fellow, Royal Society of Chemistry, UK.

A special feature of this book is addition of 40 pages of Appendices, one Appendix for each Chapter. These provide additional information about research activities of Sikh Scientists. I wish the authors to continue this series for the benefit of our younger generation. There are several books in Hindi and Punjabi about Indian Scientists. But this one is focussed on the Sikh Scientists and their achievements. It will be a blessing in disguise if this book is translated into Punjabi for the benefit of common people who want to learn about developments in Science and Technology.

## NEWS & VIEWS

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### Lecture on Gurmat - A Perspective

As a part of the ongoing lecture series, a talk was given by S. Gurbir Singh Machaki, President, Institute of Sikh Studies on March 14, 2026. The topic was - '**Gurmat – A Perspective**'. Dr. Prabhjot Kaur gave an introduction to the talk and concluded the same.

While laying lot of stress of validity and importance of *Gurmatt*, the speaker noted that fundamentals of *Gurmatt* have got lost in lives of Sikhs. Differentiating between the concepts of *Dharam* and *Mazhab*, he cleared that aim of the presentation was not to articulate the wrongs happening but to introduce ourselves to *Gurmatt*. He laid stress on accepting the ongoing (faith based) *mazhabi* activities within and outside the Sikh community, as a part of manifestation of *Hukam*. While recognizing *Santmatt* as a highly evolved system of *adhyatam*, he differentiated between *Santmatt* and *Gurmat* laying stress on the fact that Gurmat is *Gur* based, emerging out of the *Hukam* and not Guru based *matt*. He explained the concept of *matt* and how *Gurmatt* emerged as a new *matt*. Citing examples from Gurbani, he explained how new directions were given to *dhaaramic* activities being carried out at that time and new definitions were given to such activities in Gurbani. He ended the talk by quoting Gurbani through which *dharm*a is defined in *Gurmatt*.

There was an interaction between the audience and the speaker after the presentation. The event was video recorded and was aired live on youtube. The recording of the event will be part of the digital library at Institute of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh.

Post conclusion, all participants at the event attended the ongoing

*samagam* at Gurdwara Kanthala Sahib.

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### **RAMPURA PHUL GIRL CLEARS GUJARAT JUDICIAL SERVICES EXAM WITH 63RD RANK**

24-year-old Priya Mittal from Rampura Phul town, Bathinda district, has cleared the Gujarat Judicial Services Examination, securing the 63rd rank in her first attempt. The results were declared on Wednesday.

Priya is the daughter of Jagdish Mittal, a tea wholesaler, while her mother is a homemaker. The family has three children – an elder daughter working at the headquarters of a private bank in Mumbai and a son studying in Class IX.

Priya completed her BA LLB from Panjab University and briefly practised at the Barnala courts for about three to four months. She said she learnt the Gujarati language and took online coaching to prepare for the exam.

While talking to *The Tribune*, Priya said, “I appeared for this exam as the Punjab Civil Services (Judicial) exam was yet to be conducted. It was my dream to become a judge.”

Urging society to support girls equally, Priya said that if given the same facilities and environment as boys, girls could achieve anything. She thanked her parents for their constant support.

Her father Jagdish Mittal said Priya drew inspiration from her cousin, who is a judicial magistrate in Punjab. (*Courtesy: The Tribune, March 24, 2026*)

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### **OBITUARY: FORMER PUNJAB CHIEF SECRETARY WHO OPPOSED OPERATION BLUESTAR**

#### **KD Vasudeva (December 28, 1931–March 1, 2026)**

Former Punjab Chief Secretary KD Vasudeva, who helmed Punjab through the critical years leading up to Operation Bluestar and

later, is no more. He was 94. Vasudeva, a 1956-batch IAS officer of the Punjab cadre, passed away on March 1 in Vadodara.

He was visiting his daughter Vatsala Vasudeva, a 1995-batch IAS officer of the Gujarat cadre, currently Managing Director, Gujarat Industries Power Company Limited.

Vasudeva was appointed the Chief Secretary in June 1982 replacing Ishwar Chander Puri. The change was part of the government's efforts to stabilise a deteriorating law and order situation in the state.

Vasudeva is remembered in the annals of Punjab history for the stand he took against Operation Bluestar.

Former Chief Secretary of Punjab Ramesh Inder Singh, who authored "Turmoil in Punjab: Before and After Bluestar: An Insider's Story" today told The Tribune that Vasudeva as Chief Secretary was not in favour of an Army operation at the Golden Temple.

"KD Vasudeva was not in favour of the Army operation at the Golden Temple but abided by the decision of the higher-ups. I interviewed him for my book and he told me that they had advised the government against the Army operation and that even the Governor at the time BD Pandey had advised similarly," Singh said, remembering Vasudeva as an "extremely honest and simple person who would often drive to work in his own vehicle."

Born in Dehana village of Hoshiarpur in Garhshankar on December 28, 1931, Vasudeva grew up in Jalandhar Cantonment. Speaking to The Tribune today, Vatsala said her father did BA in English literature and later MA.

"He served as Bathinda DC for around four years and briefly as Ludhiana DC. He then moved to Chandigarh and served in multiple departments. He had a stint at the Food Corporation of India as well," Vatsala said, adding that her father had come to spend the winter with her in Vadodara and passed away peacefully at home.

Vasudeva remained the Chief Secretary till 1985 after which he went to the Centre. He retired in December 1989 as a Secretary to the Government of India and is survived by two daughters — Anupam

Bawa, a retired management professor at Panjab University, Chandigarh, and Vatsala Vasudeva, a serving Gujarat-cadre bureaucrat. (Courtesy: *The Tribune*, March 4, 2026)

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Dear Sir,

The article *The Untouchables* by Khushwant Singh in AOSS of Jan-Mar 2026 issue is an excellent one and heart touching narrating the martyrdom of Shri Guru Teg Bahadur Sahib. S Khushwant Singh was a writer of very high calibre. It would be appreciable and enrich the knowledge of AOSS readers if you could print more from Khushwant Singh's writings about Sikh history/Gurbani in the future issues of AOSS.

Yours sincerely

Jaswinder Singh

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